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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

PRACTICES THAT SUPPORT PRINCIPAL SUCCESSION

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Education

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College of Education and Behavioral Sciences  
Department of Leadership, Policy and Development  
Higher Education and P-12 Education  
Program of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

August 2015

This Dissertation by: Amie B. Cieminski

Entitled: *Practices that Support Principal Succession*

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Education in the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences in Department of Leadership, Policy and Development: Higher Education and P-12 Education, Program of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies.

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## ABSTRACT

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The workforce trends, demands of the job, and turnover rates for school principals are troublesome, and, yet, principals are instrumental to the success of school improvement efforts and student achievement. Succession planning is one avenue to address these issues and to help school district leaders meet their long-term leadership needs. Succession planning is a systematic approach that involves all aspects of identifying and retaining leaders including preparation, recruitment, selection, onboarding, induction, development, and retention. With the importance of principals to ensure school improvement efforts and the continued concerns about the quality and the quantity of principal candidates in the United States, the study of principal succession is imperative. This qualitative study explored the policies and practices regarding principal succession in five Colorado school districts purposely selected due to more positive working conditions as reported by the Colorado Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning (TELL) Survey and/or higher principal retention rates to further understand the extent to which school district leaders are using succession practices to meet their leadership needs. The purpose of this research project was to illuminate the nature, characteristics, and practices of principal succession in these Colorado school districts. A total of 18 semi-structured interviews were conducted with novice principals, veteran

principals, and the school district leaders who hire and support principals in these five select school districts. This study of succession practices provided insights into several actions that school district leaders can take to address two major challenges regarding the principalship: developing an adequate supply of well-qualified principal candidates and making the job of the school principal more reasonable in an effort to retain successful principals. The findings indicated there are four strategies with several action steps that educational stakeholders, school district leaders, and principals should consider to address current and future principal succession issues: leverage current practices that support the entry of principals and provide ongoing support of principals; develop future principals through the cultivation of teacher leaders and assistant principals; act purposefully to retain principals by providing differentiated support and cultivating positive relationships among principals and with school district administrators; and create and implement succession plans to integrate these actions. The findings suggested that utilizing these strategies assists school district leaders in being proactive and improving the quality and the quantity of leaders, while fostering long-term school improvement and student achievement goals.

## **DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank the countless school leaders that serve in one of the toughest positions in the school district, the principalship. I would like to express my gratitude to the principal participants of this study. The veteran principals inspired and awed me in their unswerving commitment to serve in this challenging role for the sake of their school and its students. The novice administrators have spurred my passion to help younger administrators enter and stay in the field of educational leadership. These novices are incredible, talented leaders who are not sure if they will stay in leadership. Conducting this study has given me ideas to help them thrive as leaders.

I would also like to express my appreciation for the school district leaders who boldly agreed to participate in this study even though they knew that they did not have all the answers to the issues of principal succession. They, too, are incredible leaders with a deep desire to nurture and support principals and future leaders. These school district leaders were gracious in opening their doors and allowing me to examine their practices. It is my hope that all of the participants will discover much to celebrate in the findings of this study, but, also, that these leaders will grow as leaders and in their succession practices as a result of their participation in this study and by reading its recommendations and conclusions.

I would also like to thank my research advisors, Dr. Spencer Weiler and Dr. Linda Vogel, and my committee members, Dr. Mark Smith and Dr. Tony Armenta, who pushed

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I am forever grateful for the experiences that I have had as a principal and school district leader in Greeley-Evans School District 6 and would specifically like to thank and recognize Dr. Ranelle Lang, Dr. Dana Selzer, and Ms. Nancy Devine for their support and guidance through my journey as a school administrator. I would also like to thank Mary Ellen Dawson for recognizing my leadership potential, encouraging me to become a school administrator, and providing mentoring to me over 20 years ago.

Finally, I would like to thank my family, colleagues, and friends for their encouragement and love. My children, Mitch and Courtney, are two incredible students. I, like every parent, want the best for my children and this includes schools where they are challenged, supported, and loved. I hope that my career in public education and this dissertation benefit schools and principals in ways that will help each child achieve his/her dreams.



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Over 30 years ago, the public, politicians, and taskforces called for reforms in education to help America fight against the “tide of mediocrity” as prophesied in *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). This was the beginning of the school reform movement that made student achievement the measure of school performance, put more attention on school leadership, and demanded accountability from school leaders (Levine, 2005). Since *A Nation at Risk*, the accountability movement has taken many forms including the standards movements, No Child Left Behind legislation, and, most recently, the national common core. These reforms have influenced and changed the work of school principals. Some have even argued that the current political landscape with its focus on standards, accountability, and standardization has led to a leadership model that is more reactive, compliant, and managerial which discourages aspiring leaders from entering the principalship or more formal leadership roles (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006).

Once conceived, the role of principals was to “hold” school and they did so by managing the building, teachers, and students. However, in recent years, the role of the principal has changed from manager to instructional leader with an increased focus for teaching and learning (Fink, 2010). During this same time period, evidence has accrued that demonstrates the importance of the principal in school improvement and student

achievement efforts (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). Additionally, principal turnover is increasing dramatically due to retirements, difficulties of principal retention in urban and challenging settings, the choice of principals to move before improvements are sustained, and the practice of rotation (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006). Additionally, the principal workforce trends have included turnover among principals at “an unsustainable level” (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011, p. 1), an aging population as a large number of principals near retirement age (Gates, Ringel, Santibañez, Chung, & Ross, 2003), and less job satisfaction among principals (Markow, Macia, & Lee, 2013).

The overall outcome of these changes has resulted in a dichotomy: schools and school districts need qualified leaders to implement school improvement initiatives but increased demands and accountability has led to the disenchantment of school leaders (Hargreaves & Fink, 2011). This dissatisfaction, in turn, has created higher turnover and fewer applicants, which has hampered improvement initiatives (Brundrett, Rhodes, & Gkolia, 2006). This vicious circle is detrimental to school improvement and student achievement initiatives (Louis et al, 2010; Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011).

### **Changing Role of Principal**

The principal’s role has shifted over the years as accountability for results have focused on the school as the cornerstone of change. While once seen as a manager to oversee smooth operations, including staffing and budgeting, today’s principal is seen as the key player in improving teaching and learning and the leader of school reform (Louis et al., 2010). Principals are expected to reform and transform schools through instructional leadership, which includes serving as a resource provider, instructional resource, and communicator all while maintaining a visible presence (Marzano, Waters,



& McNulty, 2005). Being the instructional leader means taking on several new key roles including vision creator and steward, culture maintainer, collegial leader, and adult developer (Marzano et al., 2005). However, it is difficult for principals to focus on primary job of improving instruction when there are so many urgent demands (Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe, & Orr, 2010).

The number of tasks and responsibilities for principals has burgeoned in recent years and few jobs have as diverse of an array of responsibilities as the modern principal (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010). Tucker and Coddling (2002) summarized the changes with the following observation:

No, the job is no longer to “keep school,” the job we trained principals for over the decades. Today we need people who can do a job we never advertised before, a job that currently serving principals were never expected to do. We need people who can lead and manage the school to much higher levels of student achievement at little or no increase in cost, in an environment in which they have much less control over the key factors that determine the outcome than similarly situated leaders and managers in most other fields. That is a very tall order. (p. 4)

Role changes have led to an overall increase in workload and stress for principals, and site-based management has increased the time on the job as they spend more time in meetings and more time facilitating (Whitaker, 2003). In this era of accountability, principals must insist on the implementation of policy, new initiatives, and changed practice (Lambert, 2003). Principals also have a great deal of responsibility and legal authority for managerial tasks such as employee and student discipline, fiscal oversight, and teacher evaluation (Lambert, 2003). Principals are spending more time relating to parents and community through councils, interactions with businesses, and marketing of the school to obtain and retain students as parent choice and charter schools continue to

grow in popularity (Whitaker, 2003). Demands on the principal's time and skills for management tasks and instructional leadership tasks have increased.

### **Principal Workforce Trends**

Workforce trends among principals include less experienced principals serving high needs schools, high mobility and turnover rates, growing dissatisfaction among principals, and the perception that there is a candidate shortage (Battle, 2009; Markow et al., 2013; Roza, 2003). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported differences in principal experience rates for 2007-08 across levels, types of schools, and various demographic makeups of schools. For schools with more than 75% of the students receiving free or reduced lunch, principal tenure was 6.8 years as compared to the national average of 8.1 years; time as principal in the current school was 3.7 years as compared to 4.8 years; and 37% of principals in had served their current school for two years or less as compared to 32.5% across the nation (Battle, 2009).

Rapid principal turnover is a reality in the United States with schools experiencing about one new principal every three to four years (Louis et al., 2010). The *2008-09 Principal Follow Up Study* conducted by NCES assessed 79.5% of the 117,000 U.S. school principals as “stayers” those who worked as a principal in the same school in the 2007-08 and 2008-09 school years, 6% as “movers” or those moved to become a principal in another school, and 12% as “leavers” because they left the principalship altogether (Battle, 2010). 53% of the public school principals who left one school moved to another school in the same school district and 45% of them retired. “Stayer” rates were higher for elementary schools and “leaver rates” were highest (13.4%) among principals at schools with more than 75% of the student population who qualified for free

or reduced lunch (Battle, 2010). Likewise, Beteille, Kalogrides, and Loeb (2011) found that, while principal turnover rates average around 20 percent, these rates were about a third higher in schools with high concentrations of low achieving, poor, and minority students. Rates of principal attrition may also be higher for some states such as California where it was projected that 40% of principals would leave their jobs before 2019 (Maxwell, 2009), or mirror the national attrition rates as in Missouri (Baker, Punswick, & Belt, 2010). Roza (2003) found that local context affected the availability of principal candidates and, thus, the turnover and mobility rates may be different from state to state, between school districts in a state, and even for individual schools within a school district. The reasons for principal mobility include increased accountability (Farkas, Johnson, & Duffett, 2003), desire to serve easier to staff schools (Beteille et al., 2011; Gates et al., 2006), and desire to leverage position moves for better salary (Baker, Punswick & Belt, 2010).

### **Explanations for Perceived Shortages**

Practitioners and researchers have offered many explanations for perceived leadership shortages and high turnover rates (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009; Whitaker, 2003; Zepeda, Bengston, & Parylo, 2012). Low retention rates are due to increased responsibilities and accountability and lack of support (Zepeda et al., 2012). Many teachers and possible school leaders, even those who have credentials, are not interested in serving as principal (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2008; Kearney, 2010; Levine, 2005; Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009). Principal salary and compensation is not always commensurate with the responsibilities (Whitaker, 2003; Zepeda et al., 2012) and there may be only a small pay differential between administrators and teachers (Maxwell,

2009). New standards for principal licensing compounds the issues of leadership recruitment (Whitaker, 2003). The intensity of the job has changed and evolved (Zepeda et al., 2012) requiring principals to spend more time fulfilling their myriad of duties (Whitaker, 2003). Finally, the rewards of giving back to the community, supporting teachers, having greater influence, and progressing on a career path are overshadowed by the downsides of accountability pressure, lack of support, lack of job security, and demanding schedules (Kearney, 2010).

Around the world, negative job images, inadequate salaries relative to the job, and inattention to recruitment and succession planning have discouraged people from entering school administration (Olson, 2008). In addition, local forces have led to shortages such as budget woes and overworked administrators in California who are staffed at one principal to 447 students compared to 306 for other parts of the country (Maxwell, 2009). Likewise, in the state of Washington shortages were attributed to fewer administrative interns and more administrative openings due to the addition of assistant principals to fulfill the growing administrative duties and increasing numbers of students (Barker, 1997). The challenges of the principalship and hiring are exacerbated in schools in culturally diverse, low income communities (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Roza, 2003). The list of reasons for the dearth of willing and qualified school leadership candidates is long and daunting and the lack of qualified candidates has the potential to undermine improvement efforts in schools and districts (Fink & Brayman, 2004).

These explanations were bolstered by a 2012 survey of 500 U.S. K-12 principals, conducted by MetLife (Markow, et al., 2013), which reported that 75% of principals believed their job has become too complex, 69% said the responsibilities were not very

similar to five years ago, and 48% felt that they are under great stress several days per week. Only 59% of principals reported being very satisfied with their job in 2012 which was down from 68% in 2008. Additionally 32% reported that they are very likely or fairly likely to leave their job as a school principal to go into some different occupation (Markow et al., 2013). Overall, rising demands are affecting job satisfaction and stability rates for principals.

### **Possible Solutions to Supply and Demand Issues**

With demands of the principal position accumulating and the number of qualified, willing candidates diminishing, states and school districts are looking for solutions to solve the principal leadership crisis in schools to address the supply and demand sides of the problem. Solutions to address the supply of leaders include making school leadership a more attractive career (Olson, 2008), offering signing bonuses (Mitgang, Gill, & Cummins, 2013), recognition programs, salary adjustments or pay for performance incentives (Kearney, 2010). Being trained as a coach or mentor may also be ways of promoting the principalship and motivating principals to stay on the job (Kearney, 2010). In one study of leadership stability in Missouri schools, higher salaries were associated with principal retention as principals with lower salaries leveraged moves to positions with higher salaries (Baker et al., 2010). Although some states allow alternative licensing to increase the supply (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011), human resource officials are reluctant to hire principal candidates without education experience (Farkas et al., 2003). If leaders are charged with improving teaching and learning, not just managing a building, it could be extremely challenging for people without an education background to take on the principalship (Fink, 2010). Kearney (2010) endorsed recruitment efforts

including a recruitment campaign explaining why being a principal is “worth it” (p. 4), working to make sure the job is more doable, providing incentives, and ensuring there are multiple paths to leadership development.

Another way to address the supply of effective school leaders with the competencies needed is through leadership preparation and development and traditional programs are not producing enough of these leaders (US Department of Education, 2013; Roza, 2003). Although there are over 500 principal preparation programs at colleges and universities, critics claimed that many university preparation programs inadequately prepared candidates for the current realities of the position and were out of step with school district needs due to outdated curriculum, lack of field experiences, and lack of meaningful ongoing job-embedded training (Bottoms & O’Neill, 2001; Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Levine, 2005; Mitgang et al., 2013). The supply of leaders could be strengthened by providing better preparation, professional development, and specialized training for current and future leaders (Olson, 2008; Mitgang et al., 2013). Coaching and mentoring may support new principals (James-Ward, 2013), as well as being trained as a coach or mentor may motivate principals to stay on the job (Kearney, 2010). Multiple forms of leadership development have been proposed to address principal workforce issues.

Many solutions to the leadership crisis to address the demand side have been proposed including clarifying roles and responsibilities (Olson, 2008); redesigning the structure of the position (Whitaker, 2003); making the position more doable by hiring other leaders to take on business or instructional roles (Tucker & Coddington, 2002); making the authority of the principal position commensurate with the responsibility and

accountability associated with it (Tucker & Coddling, 2002); providing incentives to attract candidates (Olson, 2008; Kearney, 2010), and providing ongoing professional development for principals (Olson, 2008). A study of 22 countries conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development recommended clarifying roles and responsibilities of principals, distributing leadership tasks, providing better professional development and preparation for current and future leaders, and making school leadership a more attractive career (Olson, 2008). Another approach to answering the leadership crisis is to affront the demand side of the equation and restructure the position by limiting the number and pace of external initiatives and moving past the pursuit of standardization and external targets (Hargreaves & Fink, 2011). In their efforts to solve their own leadership troubles, states and school districts have implemented piecemeal strategies that may lack coherence and only serve as short-term solutions. Two other approaches must be examined which take a long-term view of leadership development and sustainability: distributed leadership and leadership succession planning.

### **Distributed Leadership**

Distributed, or shared, leadership is another solution to rapid principal turnover and a more responsive approach to leadership demands since many old organizational structures do not fit the requirements of learning systems in the twenty-first century (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004). Distributed leadership focuses on leadership practices and the interactions between school personnel, rather than formal and informal leadership roles, and has been found to make a positive difference on student learning and organizational outcomes (Harris & Spillane, 2008). In relationship to principal

succession, Louis et al. (2010) concluded that “shared leadership distribution can moderate the negative consequences of rapid principal turnover, but only where existing school cultures are strong and supportive of teacher leadership” (p. 22). In schools with rapid teacher turnover or a culture that worked against teacher leadership models, principal leadership was necessary to improve the school (Louis et al., 2010).

Principal succession planning and distributed leadership models are not mutually exclusive concepts. If seated leaders develop a culture of distributed leadership, they may minimize the negative effects of turnover since distributed leadership can be a productive response to these turnovers (Mascall, Monroe, Jantzi, Walker, & Sacks, 2011). In examining the distributed leadership patterns in four schools with high principal turnover, Mascall and Leithwood (2010) advanced that the effects of rapid principal turnover could be diminished with the use of distributed leadership, especially if the schools had planfully aligned patterns. Planfully aligned models were described as those where leadership functions were rationally distributed through planful thought. Additionally, Mascall et al. (2011) advocated for the use of distributed leadership in a planful way to keep the school moving forward rather than as a way for teachers to insulate themselves from the new principals and his/her initiatives. Similarly, Hargreaves and Fink (2004) argued that current leaders have responsibility for promoting school improvement, especially after they are gone, through the distribution of leadership and responsibility. Predecessor principals ensured the continuation of culture and vision when they developed a distributed leadership model in which all teachers were involved in the development of that vision and culture of the school using a model that built on strengths of the staff and needs of the school (Grachinsky, 2008). Although distributed



leadership holds promise to mitigate the effects of succession, without purposeful use and alignment of distributed leadership and a collaborative culture, it seems unlikely that student achievement will improve in schools experiencing rapid succession (Louis et al., 2010; Mascall & Leithwood, 2010).

### **Succession Planning to Address Leadership Needs**

“Succession is the process in any organization that marks the departure of one administrative leader and the entry of his or her successor” (White & Cooper, 2011, p. 1). In the business world, succession planning has been a topic of research since the 1980s and leadership succession has become a major initiative in the private sector (Fink & Brayman, 2004). Although states, school districts, and school leaders are responding to the issues of principal workforce trends in a variety of ways, there has been little attention given to succession planning within schools (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Mascall et al., 2011). Succession planning “consists of a systematic, long-term approach to meeting the present and future talent needs of an organization to continue to achieve its mission and meet or exceed its business objectives” (Rothwell, Jackson, Knight, & Lindholm, 2005, p. 27) and includes the adoption of specific procedures to assure the identification, development, strategic application, and long-term retention of talented individuals (Rothwell, 2010). Schmidt-Davis and Bottoms (2011) described succession planning for school leaders as a virtuous cycle that includes talent identification, talent development, selection, onboarding and support, evaluation and process improvement, and the development of future leaders. Succession practices for schools can be grouped by three categories: recruitment and selection processes, onboarding and induction, and retention efforts. Literature regarding succession practices will be examined in detail in Chapter II.

### **Rationale**

There is a crisis of educational leadership succession due to demographic and generational issues and fueled by a demanding reform climate which is forcing fundamental rethinking about how to recruit and develop new educational leaders (Hargreaves & Fink, 2011). Growing concerns over perceived shortages of qualified and willing principal candidates in the near future have compelled the educational community to look for solutions that will increase the quality and quantity of school principal candidates that can take on the increasing challenges of the job. Many experienced school leaders are retiring and school districts need to be able to replace these leaders and also “attract the best and the brightest school leaders to sustain high performing schools and turn-around low-performing schools” (Harchar & Campbell, 2010, pp. 93-94). The current realities of the position of principal, the numerous reasons for shortages, and the high turnover require a change to leadership recruiting, development, and personnel practices for states, school districts, and schools (Barker, 1997; Olson, 2008). The detrimental effects of principal turnover on school improvement and climate can be exacerbated where rapid succession events occur. In these schools, a lack of shared purpose, cynicism amongst staff members, and difficulties focusing on ongoing school improvement efforts may exist (Louis et al., 2010). Succession planning offers a viable solution to these issues (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011).

Succession planning is one approach to this challenge that is growing in acceptance and is a topic of increasing urgency in the western world (Fink & Brayman, 2004). Succession planning is a proactive process which can save time, money, retain talented employees, and promote a future-minded learning organization (Rothwell, 1994,

2010). Succession planning and management can help stabilize the tenure of personnel and ensure that organizations have both the quality and quantity of leaders needed to meet its strategic goals (Rothwell, 1994, 2010). Currently, in education there is a dichotomy since people believe that succession planning is needed but is not practiced widely (Mascall et al., 2010). Although some states and school districts have addressed some of the issues regarding principal succession, many states and school district leaders are not aware of immensity of the challenge or effective leadership development practices that they should employ to address the problem. Therefore, it is imperative to assess and examine the current state of principal succession planning and practices to inform practice and policy (Zepeda et al., 2012).

There is inherent and significant value in implementing succession planning strategies for school leaders as enacting succession plans can help school districts be proactive and have a “strong bench” of principal candidates (Riddick, 2009). Further, ensuring an adequate supply of qualified leaders is important to the success of individual schools and to national success (Brundrett et al., 2006). Principal succession practices and policies that foster student achievement or school improvement are important to many members of the educational community. Similarly, solving the problems of recruiting and retaining principals will take coordinated and collaborative action on the part of governing bodies, schools, districts, universities, states, and professional organizations (Whitaker, 2003).

Although there is a growing recognition of the need to develop school leaders and the importance of succession planning, there has not been a focus on leadership succession in the educational leadership literature. Some research has been conducted on

the effects of principal succession within schools (Hart, 1993; Macmillan, Meyer, Northfield, & Foley, 2011). Most information regarding succession is experiential or anecdotal and there is a need to “bridge the gap between the theory and the practice of succession processes” (White & Cooper, 2011, p. 3). Different researchers have commented on the scarcity of research regarding various aspects of succession claiming that leadership succession in schools has been a relatively neglected phenomenon (Brundrett et al., 2006; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006); there has not been a focus on how school systems plan and manage leader succession (Zepeda et al., 2012); and present literature offers little insight into elements of succession management and leadership supply activity (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009). Also, little is known regarding succession practices for school districts in the United States, although studies have been conducted in some school districts in Georgia (Bengston, 2010; Zepeda et al., 2012) and in Florida (Stutsman, 2007). Upon completion of the study in Florida, Stutsman (2007) recommended further studies of various states of the United States to explore the extent to which school districts have succession plans and qualitative case studies of school districts which have successful models for succession planning. Given these conditions, it is timely and fitting for a study exploring succession practices in school districts in Colorado.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The need for high quality, highly trained instructional leaders who can improve teaching and learning and who will stay in a principal position for several years has never been more apparent than it is today. The effects of the principal on student learning and school improvement are widely documented (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Louis et al., 2010;

Murphy, Elliot, Goldring, & Porter, 2006). However, many state and district leaders have expressed concern over the difficulty in hiring principals (Roza, 2003) and principal turnover is problematic to school improvement (Louis et al., 2010). Teacher satisfaction with working conditions has also been linked to the quality of school leadership (New Teacher Center [NTC], 2013a). Succession is a complex phenomenon that some have envisioned as a virtuous circle when state, district, and principals take action (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011). Yet, very few school districts have spent time and energy creating succession plans (Hargreaves & Fink, 2011) to respond to these conditions.

There is a lack of understanding of what school districts can do to increase the retention of high quality principals as part of a comprehensive succession plan. Since there are limited qualitative studies regarding the perceptions of district staff and principals as they transition into a new position and very few studies exploring what systems are in place in school districts, it is appropriate to delve into succession practices in districts with higher principal retention and teacher satisfaction rates. By capturing the perceptions of both principals and those who hire and supervise them at the district level, a description can be formulated that might be used by other educational leaders to strengthen their succession practices and policies.

### **Research Questions**

To gain a more in-depth understanding of school district practices for principal succession, the focus of this study was embedded in the following questions:

- Q1     What are the principal succession practices of large school districts with high teacher satisfaction as reported on the 2013 Colorado Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning (TELL) Survey when controlling for student demographics?

- Q2     What are the principal succession practices of large school districts with high principal retention rates when controlling for student demographics?
- Q3     What are the policies and practices that school district employees believe influence the retention of principals?

### **Nature of the Study**

This qualitative case study developed a description of the principal succession practices drawn from the experiences of several school district principals and administrators that are closely involved in succession that might be useful to school district leaders and policy makers regarding principal succession practices and policies. Using a constructivist approach, I learned about these individuals, about aspects of their social environment, and about the interactions between the two (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). This inquiry focused on the different social realities that individuals create as they interact with the phenomena. Semi-structured interviews, of both principals and school district administrators conducted at several school districts, allowed me, as the researcher, to explore what actually works in practice, to be sensitive to individuals in the settings, and to represent the complexities found in the process (Creswell, 2008). I used open and axial coding procedures to analyze the data including constant comparative methods (Charmaz, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In addition to interviews, I examined written documents when seeking to understand how organizational practices and policies were carried out (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

### **Limitations**

This study examined the succession practices in five school districts in Colorado chosen through purposeful sampling fully described in Chapter III. This study explored the perspectives of principals and school district office administrators who have

knowledge of succession practices. This purposeful selection of individual participants and sites yielded information-rich cases to illuminate the research questions of the study (Patton, 2002). Multiple sites may help the researcher elaborate on the varieties of practice that may exist (Bassey, 2007), and it was hoped that through constant comparative techniques the researcher could identify codes and categories to develop a rich description of the phenomena (Charmaz, 2001; Creswell, 2008) that is useful to practitioners and policy makers.

There are no rules regarding adequate sample size for qualitative studies as it depends on the purpose, rationale, and research questions of the study, what will be useful, and what can be done with available resources and time (Patton, 2002). In discussing data collection for a phenomenological study Creswell (2007) indicated that interviews with five to 25 individuals could provide ample opportunity to identify themes and conduct cross-case theme analysis in a single study. With the emergent nature of this study, I was aware of these limitations and that I could adjust the sampling techniques, identification of participants, or methods used as the study progressed as is consistent in qualitative designs (Creswell, 2008, 2015; Gall et al., 2007). Throughout the data collection, I made decisions regarding participants and the observation at school district activities that became part of the data that I considered in the analysis.

### **Purpose of the Study**

With the importance of principals to ensure school improvement efforts and the continued concerns about the quality and quantity of principal candidates in the United States, the study of principal succession is imperative. This qualitative study explored the policies and practices regarding principal succession in Colorado school districts with

more positive working conditions as reported by the 2013 TELL Colorado Survey and/or higher principal retention rates to further understand the extent to which school districts are using succession practices to meet their leadership needs. This study illuminated some principal succession practices that these districts use and provided useful insights to other school district leaders, policy makers, and others regarding the retention of high quality principals.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms are pertinent to this study and defined in the following manner:

*Large School District.* School districts with over 5,000 students enrolled in their K-12 program and with over 350 site-based licensed employees.

*Succession.* The “process in any organization that marks the departure of one administrative leader and the entry of his or her successor” (White & Cooper, 2011, p. 1).

*Succession Planning.* The “systematic, long-term approach to meeting the present and future talent needs of an organization to continue to achieve its mission and meet or exceed its business objectives” (Rothwell et al., 2005, p. 27). Succession planning includes the adoption of specific procedures to assure the identification, development, strategic application, and long-term retention of talented individuals (Rothwell, 2010).

*Succession Planning Framework for Schools.* A virtuous cycle that includes talent identification, talent development, selection, onboarding and support, evaluation and process improvement, and the development of future leaders (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011).



*Well-qualified Principal.* A principal that has the qualifications and credentials to hold the position as specified through principal job descriptions.

### **Conclusion**

Problems with the principal workforce and the need for principals who are willing and able to do this difficult job are causing a change in school district practices for preparation, recruitment, orientation, and retention of principals. In this chapter, I reviewed some of the proposed solutions to the supply and demand issues regarding principals and introduced the concept of succession planning as one solution that has been lauded in the private sector but not practiced widely within school settings. In this qualitative study, I explored succession practices in several Colorado school districts from the perspectives of principals and the school district administrators that hire and supervise them. Once the data was collected, I used open and axial coding techniques to analyze the data. In Chapter II, I review the literature associated with succession practices in both the private sector and in schools and also review the connections between principals and other indicators of quality within schools.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this chapter, I review the literature related to succession, and, specifically principal succession. I begin by discussing the literature related to the importance of the principal including the effects of principal succession on schools as well as the effects of school leadership on teacher satisfaction and retention. I review how principal standards and certification interplay with succession. Next, I address succession practices in the private sector and compare them to those used in education. I also consider succession practices that relate to three phases of a principal's career: preparation and selection, orientation and induction, and long-term retention. Finally, I review the context for this study, the principalship in the state of Colorado.

#### **The Importance of the Principal**

While the principal's effect on school improvement was once unknown, studies have indicated that the principal exerts considerable influence on school improvement and student learning (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010; Murphy, Elliot, Goldring, & Porter, 2006). In an analysis of studies on principal leadership and school improvement from 1980 to 1995, Hallinger and Heck (1998) concluded that principals do make a difference in student learning, but in indirect ways. Hallinger and Heck noted that researchers have begun to create elaborate models that demonstrate the ways that leadership mediates the various variables that lead to

school improvement. Four paths that leaders used to effect student learning outcomes were school goals, school structure and social networks, people, and organizational culture (Hallinger & Heck, 1998).

As more empirical evidence is gathered and new models of leadership emerge, the importance of the principal has been confirmed. Murphy, Elliot, Goldring, and Porter (2006) analyzed current empirical research about school leaders in effective schools, learning-centered leadership, school improvement, and principal and superintendent instructional leadership. Murphy et al. concluded that learning-centered leadership is well suited for schools in times of change and reform. Although team leadership can enhance organizational effectiveness, Murphy et al. maintained that student success is still influenced by the experiences, knowledge, values, and personal characteristics of the school leader (Murphy, Elliot, Goldring, & Porter, 2006). More recently, Louis et al. (2010) found that a principal's effect is second, behind the effect of the classroom teacher, in terms of school related influencing student learning. This effect, however, was not a direct correlation but was mediated through many other factors such as school culture, teacher morale, and vision and focus. Nevertheless, Louis et al. concluded that principals, as leaders, were uniquely positioned to leverage the human and institutional resources to increase achievement. Even proponents of building leadership capacity throughout the entire staff have recognized the role of the principal: "As long as we have schools that need to be improved or improvements that need to be sustained, the role of the principal will be important" (Lambert, 2003, p. 57).

The emerging evidence that school leadership influences learner outcomes has wide-reaching implications. For example, this evidence and the increasing complexity of

schools has led more countries to require special preparation and development for school principals although preparation programs differ in content, providers, and modes of delivery (Bush, 2012). Equally, under No Child Left Behind all of the options for turning around failing schools involve drastic changes in structure and leadership including changing the principal (McLester, 2011). In a review of the turnaround literature, Murphy (2008) warned that “leader proof” turnaround strategies were not likely to bring about positive differences, that leadership “is the most critical element in the narrative of organizational recovery,” and that a change in top-level leadership is almost always required for organizations to recover (p. 90). Additionally, new evaluation models for principals that link principal effectiveness to both student learning outcomes and teacher effectiveness are being developed and widely disseminated (Louis et al., 2010).

### **Effects of Principal Turnover**

There is an abundance of evidence that leadership succession impacts schools.

One of the earliest works on principal succession stated:

Leadership succession is a frequent organizational event of tremendous importance to those who work in schools. It is disruptive, and its outcomes can be dysfunctional if the new principal fails to become an integrated and respected member of the social system whose leadership has received the affirmation of the school as a whole. In contrast, when a successor achieves this goal, her ability to have a positive impact on the school and its performance is substantially enhanced. (Hart, 1993, p. 299)

Leadership succession has an impact on the culture of the school and teacher morale, individually and collectively (Macmillan, Meyer, Northfield, & Foley, 2011; Meyer, Macmillan, & Northfield, 2009). Meyer et al. (2009) found that informal leaders were critical in maintaining morale when there was instability in the principal’s office and that newer teachers were more nervous about the new principal which tended to drive down

morale. Leadership succession is an emotionally intense process for teachers in a school in which the emotions of teachers can range from hope to fear, abandonment to relief, and expectation to loss (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006).

Although principal turnover is expected eventually, rapid succession has been found to be detrimental to staff culture and morale (Macmillan et al., 2011). It has many negative effects on student achievement and results in no real changes in classroom practice (Louis et al., 2010). Frequent succession events, rapid rotation, and premature exit by leaders can hurt school improvement efforts and breed staff cynicism that subverts the new principal's credibility and long-term improvement (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Additionally, with rapid principal succession, teachers may harden their attitudes against improvement efforts regardless of their worthiness and build resistant cultures (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006).

If the needs, policies, and practices of school districts and those of the school conflict at the time of administrator turnover, district-level practices and policies regarding principal selection and transfer have been found to have negative and unanticipated consequences and end up sabotaging initiatives that the district is trying to implement (Macmillan et al., 2011). In studying the effects of principal turnover on teachers, Macmillan et al. (2011) found that rotation and hiring policies that served the needs of the district rather than the individual school hindered teacher trust in the new principal and the implementation of initiatives leading to a lack of commitment to the new principal and the new direction.

School district leaders need to realize that top-down reforms may be counterproductive during times of leadership transition. Principals have struggled to

engage staff and develop a shared sense of meaning, especially if the principals are inexperienced and entering at the same time as district-mandated reforms (Fink & Brayman, 2004). Although succession provides a window of opportunity to implement reform since everyone expects change during a transition, superiors should not misinterpret the absence of conflict as progress since retreat or accommodation could signal a stop of progress (Hart, 1993). Instead, school districts should shape experiences and structures that influence the organizational socialization of the new principal and enhance desired outcomes. When administrators, policymakers, and principals pay attention to succession issues, it is possible for schools and principals to change, develop, and grow as a result of leader succession (Hart, 1993).

### **Connection between Teachers, Achievement, And School Leadership**

It is important to understand the links between teacher retention, student achievement, and school administration. Boyd et al. (2011), in a study of teacher retention in New York City, found that views regarding administration and administrative support emerged as the main factor in teacher perceptions of working conditions and actual teacher attrition behaviors. Teachers' perceptions regarding school administration had the greatest impact on teacher retention decisions among school contextual factors including student behaviors, facilities, influence over policy, and staff relations (Boyd et al., 2011). After controlling for school and teacher characteristics, Boyd et al. claimed that teacher perceptions of administration were predictive of teacher decisions to stay, stating that the more positively the teachers viewed the administration, the more likely the teachers were to stay, and, equally, that dissatisfaction with the job and specifically, dissatisfaction with administration was the most important factor for staff departures.

In a similar study of teacher satisfaction, career intentions, and working conditions, Johnson, Kraft, and Papay (2012) found that Massachusetts teachers were more satisfied and planned to stay longer if the working conditions were positive, regardless of the student demographics. Moreover, Johnson et al. (2010) concluded that social conditions including the school culture, collaboration with colleagues, and principal leadership were predictive of satisfaction and a teacher's intent to stay. Finally, in linking teacher working conditions to student achievement, Johnson et al. found predictive evidence that students demonstrated more academic growth in schools with supportive contexts for teachers.

Additionally, in a longitudinal study of the relationships between principal turnover, teacher turnover, and student achievement in the Miami-Dade County School District, Beteille, Kalogrides, and Loeb (2011) found that principal turnover was positively associated with teacher turnover and negatively associated with student achievement. Greater instability among leadership was detrimental to student outcomes and the effects of turnover were intensified with the succession of new principals as opposed to more experienced ones. For failing schools, the negative relationship between principal turnover and student achievement was even stronger. Findings from these studies suggest that policies aimed at the recruitment of experienced principals may allay the detrimental effects of turnover on student achievement (Beteille et al., 2011), that improving school administration, especially in high-turnover schools, may be effective at reducing teacher turnover (Boyd et al., 2011), and that one of the most important actions that superintendents can take to improve schools is to hire principals who know how to

provide a supportive, collaborative working environments for teachers (Johnson et al., 2012).

The Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning (TELL) Survey is a full-population survey that was administered in nine states between the spring of 2012 and the spring of 2013 (New Teacher Center [NTC], 2013a). The TELL Survey is a statistically valid and reliable instrument that measures eight research-based factors regarding working conditions of educators: time, facilities and resources, community support and involvement, managing student conduct, teacher leadership, school leadership, professional development, and instructional practices and support (NTC, 2013f). These eight constructs have been empirically linked to teacher retention and student learning (NTC, 2013f). Based on the TELL Survey results, NTC (2013a) recommended that states assess their policies regarding principal preparation, recruitment, induction, and support to ensure that through preparation programs and professional development leaders have the skills and capacity to build strong school cultures, positive trusting school climates, and supportive conditions for teaching and learning.

### **Principal Standards and Certification**

State policymakers have power to support the creation of more effective school leaders and change the succession landscape through their influence on the quality and content of preparation programs, standards, and certification requirements (Kearney, 2010; Orr et al., 2010). Certification is not a guarantee for quality candidates or for performance: “Where certification was initially developed to be a proxy for competence or capability it is clear that school leadership requires very different capabilities than are guaranteed by the present licensing and hiring process” (Roza, 2003, p. 50).



Requirements for initial certification vary widely between states with the majority of states requiring most of the following: an approved preparation program, a graduate degree, teaching certification, and teaching experience. (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2008). There is a debate regarding the requirements for certification. Some people contend that entrance for preparation programs leading to certification should be more selective (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2008), while others reason that states should allow more avenues for alternative licensing (Abramson, Furman, Huynh, & Malbin, 2012). Abramson et al. (2012) advocated for the creation of a Transitional Principal License to create more opportunities and give school districts flexibility to meet their leadership needs. A Transitional Principal License would allow candidates who are selected through a rigorous hiring process, assigned a mentor, and deemed “effective” through the principal evaluation system to be granted a license (Abramson et al., 2012). These principals could continue to be licensed by receiving effective ratings through the principal evaluation system (Abramson et al., 2012). However, continuing to seek alternatives for certification, which would permit the hiring experienced leaders from other fields, may be fruitless since 99.3% of all public principals have been teachers, human resource departments rely on teaching experience as a screening tool, and non-traditional candidates, even those with leadership experiences in other fields, are generally not considered for principal positions (Roza, 2003).

If school leader candidates are ill-prepared for the current work that principals must do, principal standards must be updated to reflect the current skills and knowledge needed in today’s educational world (Bottoms & O’Neill, 2001). The *Educational Leadership Policy Standards: ISLLC 2008* provide guidance to states regarding

educational leadership preparation, licensure, evaluation, and professional development (Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2008). The Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards for School Leaders were first created in 1996 in an effort to improve a school leader's ability to improve teaching and learning. Since 1996, 43 states have adopted these standards or used them as a template to create their own standards (CCSSO, 2008). The revised standards were built on an extensive research base in consultation with higher education officials, policy leaders, practitioners, and professional organizations. CCSSO summed up the importance of the standards by stating, "Therefore, incorporating clear and consistent standards and expectations into a statewide education system can be a core predictor of strong school leadership" (CCSSO, 2008, p. 4). CCSSO further promoted these standards as "the first step toward for creating comprehensive, locally tailored approaches for developing and retaining high-quality school leaders" and advocated for their use to help local school boards screen and hire applicants (p. 5). In conclusion, states can adopt practices that identify potential leaders, plan quality school leadership growth opportunities for leaders, make performance and ongoing learning part of professional certification, and make changes and offer alternatives to traditional university preparation programs to address succession challenges (Bottoms & O'Neill, 2001).

### **Succession Planning**

The current realities of the position of principal and workforce trends require a change in leadership recruiting, development, and personnel practices for states, school districts, and schools (Barker, 1997; Olson, 2008), and succession planning offers a viable solution to these issues (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011). There is inherent and

significant value in implementing succession planning strategies for school leaders as enacting succession plans can help school districts be proactive and have a “strong bench” of principal candidates (Riddick, 2009). Further, ensuring an adequate supply of qualified leaders is important to the success of individual schools and to the entire nation (Brundrett, Rhodes, & Gkolia, 2006).

### **Succession Planning in the Business Sector**

In the business world, succession planning has been a topic of research since the 1980s, and leadership succession has become a major initiative in the private sector (Fink & Brayman, 2004). Once seen as a way to plan for the replacement of Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), current succession planning practices focus on multiple levels of leadership and the development of human capital as a valuable asset in highly successful businesses (Butler & Roche-Tarry, 2002). Succession planning goes beyond replacement planning which is the identification of potential leader back-ups toward a strategic initiative that includes individual development plans and the inclusion of many departments and people (Rothwell, 2010). In effective organizations, succession planning is seen as an ongoing process rather than a hiring event. Talent pools are one approach to succession planning in which many people are identified and developed rather than designating one successor for a position (Rothwell, 2010), and organizations are better served by identifying and developing multiple high potential leaders rather than designating or developing a single heir apparent (Groves, 2007).

Critical features of succession plans that had a high-impact on business were succession plans that encompassed many leadership levels and positions in addition to planning for the high level executives (Groves, 2007; Lamoureux, Campbell, & Smith,

2009; Rothwell, 1994), the inclusion of actionable development plans that included follow-through and were reviewed regularly (Lamoureux et al., 2009), and the involvement of senior management in succession planning and not just the human resources department (Butler & Roche-Tarry, 2002; Lamoureux et al., 2009). Conger and Fulmer (2003) offered five actions for developing a succession management system that would serve an organization and potential leaders better: (1) pair succession planning with leadership development, (2) identify linchpin positions, (3) make succession planning more transparent, (4) measure progress by making sure that the “right people are moving at the right pace into the right jobs at the right time” (p. 81), and (5) keep the system flexible to meet the needs of the organization.

Individual leadership development plans can be a tool in succession planning that support individual development beyond mentoring or broad based leadership training (Fulmer & Conger, 2004). These plans can include discussions with the employee, past and current supervisors, and feedback to the employee (Fulmer & Conger, 2004). Companies can also combine classroom training with job-rotation and special assignments to expose employees to a variety of situations, jobs, and bosses (Beck & Conchie, 2012; Fulmer & Conger, 2004). However, job rotation may not always be a sensible approach to succession planning since it may place talented leaders into positions which do not fit their capabilities (Beck & Conchie, 2012). “Action learning” programs, in which high potential leaders are brought together to study and make recommendations on a pressing topic, provide valuable developmental experiences for potential leaders and can result in a useful work product or provide solutions to challenges inside the business also (Fulmer & Conger, 2004). Companies are encouraged

to provide breakthrough experiences such as leading a visible project, working overseas, or starting a new project in conjunction with targeted and individualized training to help develop high potential employees (Beck & Conchie, 2012). Businesses utilize many approaches to developing potential leaders within succession management systems.

Managers are an important aspect of succession planning (Groves, 2007; Rothwell, 2010). Managers and other leaders assist by providing performance feedback, executive coaching, mentoring, networking, new job assignments, and action learning to enhance succession planning efforts (Groves, 2007). Current leaders are also vital in identifying high potential employees, developing project-based experiences, creating a supportive culture, providing contextualized training, and exposing high potential employees to various stakeholders within the organization (Groves, 2007).

### **Benefits of Succession Planning**

Succession planning has many benefits for companies and employees. It enables organizations to assess its present and future needs for talent and to discuss how to recognize and develop talent (Beck & Conchie, 2012; Rothwell, 2010). It develops and maintains strong leadership while serving as a powerful tool to identify, retain, and motivate top leadership within an organization (Butler & Roche-Tarry, 2002; Rothwell, 1994). Succession planning helps illuminate career paths, establish priorities for training and development needs, and create more comprehensive human resources planning systems inside organizations (Rothwell, 2010). Succession planning assists organizations in aligning their human capital needs with their strategic goals, address an aging management workforce, ensure that leadership is ready in the event of an unexpected event, and conduct an inventory of human capital strengths and gaps (Butler & Roche-

Tarry, 2002). Finally, robust succession planning can support companies achieve other successful business indicators such as the ability to accelerate change and achieve better business growth (Lamoureux et al., 2009).

### **Succession Management Systems**

Complex succession management systems align individual development plans, succession planning, and the strategic goals of the company (Rothwell, 1010; Butler & Roche-Tarry, 2002; Fulmer & Conger, 2004; Lamoureux, et al., 2009). While succession planning includes selection and development of internal candidates who have the potential to fill leadership roles (Beck & Conchie, 2012), succession management enables companies to merge the goals and talent needs of the business with the career aspirations and capabilities of its employees (Lamoureux et al., 2009). Succession planning has evolved over the past 30 years and succession management strategies can be categorized into levels of maturity (Lamoureux et al., 2009). In an industry study, talent managers, business leaders, and business executives reported that the majority of companies (52%) operated with a traditional succession plan that included the identification of high potentials, talent reviews, and individual development planning, but up to 21% of companies had no succession plan (Lamoureux et al., 2009). Some challenges that have prevented organizations from participating in succession planning and management have included more immediate organizational challenges taking priority, limited resources to engage in succession planning, or the inability to predict future skills and competencies for leaders in the future (“Succession Planning,” 2005).

### **Differences in Succession Approaches Between Private and Public Sectors**

There are some important differences between effective succession practices of businesses and those of other organizations including governmental agencies, nonprofits, small businesses, family businesses, and educational institutions since effective succession and management planning must recognize the increasing dynamics of organizations and be sensitive to the unique needs of organizations in terms of culture, industry, economic sector, leadership structure, and size (Rothwell, 2010). In general, the theory of succession planning found in the private sector can be applied to school systems although there may be unique characteristics or practices within the school setting (Zepeda, Bengston, & Parylo, 2012). Hargreaves and Fink (2003) claimed that “Education has much to learn from private sector about planning for succession” (p. 700).

In general, the public sector has allowed candidates to self-select, seeks replacements, and sees succession planning as an additional cost to the organization while the private sector has conducted proactive recruiting, defined future needs, had more formalized succession plans, and seen succession planning as an asset to the organization (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Santora, Sarros, and Cooper (2011) observed that succession planning for nonprofits lagged behind industry and was not a priority in the United States and Australia, leaving the majority of nonprofit agencies underprepared for succession and lacking in succession planning components such as a policy to promote internal candidates, deputy directors that can assume the executive director role, and executive director involvement with boards of directors when selecting a successor (Santora, Sarros, & Cooper, 2011).

Some of the differences between private sector and public sector succession encompass the culture, norms, and regulations within the school system (Rothwell, 2010). Procedures requiring job postings and competitive searches, budget constraints, and union agreements may preclude schools from naming a successor and prevent schools from using some succession practices (Rothwell, 2010). Another explanation for the lack of succession planning in schools is that these practices run counter to the egalitarian ethic that all teachers should be treated the same with equal pay defined by a salary schedule and equal opportunities (Myung, Loeb, & Horng, 2011). If individual teachers choose to pursue leadership, it is predicated on their individual desires and actions, and, thus, does not oppose the egalitarian ethic. However, succession management introduces transparent status differences based on leadership potential which runs counter this ethic and has potential to disrupt the status quo. A talent pool approach may be more consistent with the regulations, cultures, and organizational realities of educational entities (Rothwell, 2010).

Despite these differences, some school districts have implemented programs that are aligned with private sector practices. For example, Appoquinimink (Delaware) School District leaders operated a leadership succession program (Brittingham, 2009). Brittingham (2009) reported that leaders established a clear process for selecting candidates for the program and required candidates to complete district-wide projects to improve their understanding of issues and expand their experiences. Top leaders, beginning with the superintendent and school board members, supplied district-wide commitment (Brittingham, 2009). School district leaders developed a program which addressed the current and future needs of the district which included a regiment of regular



goal-setting, feedback, and self-reflection (Brittingham, 2009). All of these practices were aligned with those in the literature regarding private sector succession. Likewise, Bengston (2010), in the study of one Georgia school system, found that the system aligned many of its succession practices with those identified in the private-sector literature including support from top leadership, formal mentoring, an emphasis on leadership development, and the identification of leadership competencies.

### **State of Succession Planning in Schools**

Succession planning is not the norm in the field of education and structured succession plans are rare in school districts (Hartle & Thomas, 2006). “In general, planned succession is one of the most neglected aspects of leadership theory and practice in our schools. Indeed, it is one of the most persistently missing pieces in the effort to secure the sustainability of school improvement” (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003, p. 699). When studying principal succession in several schools, Mascal, Monroe, Jantzi, Walker, and Sacks (2011) posited that, even though principal succession implied a deliberate process, changing principals was often unplanned and led to detrimental changes in the school.

One important factor in succession is whether the transition represents a continuation or discontinuation with past directions and to what extent the transition is planned (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006). Hargreaves and Fink (2006) discussed four types of succession events between leaders: planned continuity, unplanned continuity, planned discontinuity, and unplanned discontinuity claiming that sustained school improvement depended on carefully planned continuity. Planned continuity can be beneficial if potential candidates are identified early, actively groomed, provided training, exposed to

multiple aspects of the positions, given feedback, and assigned tasks to stretch and grow them (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006). Planned discontinuity can bring about much needed change to turn around a failing schools, provide a jolt to the organization, or implement a top-down reform agenda (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006). While this jolt to the system may bring a sense of urgency and start the school on a new course, leaders should be careful to diagnose exactly which things need changing and focus on building a culture and continuity so that there is not a constant cycle of change (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006). . Yet, Hargreaves and Fink (2006) stated that, in most cases of school succession, succession is unplanned and there is little regard for whether the change will bring continuity or discontinuity.

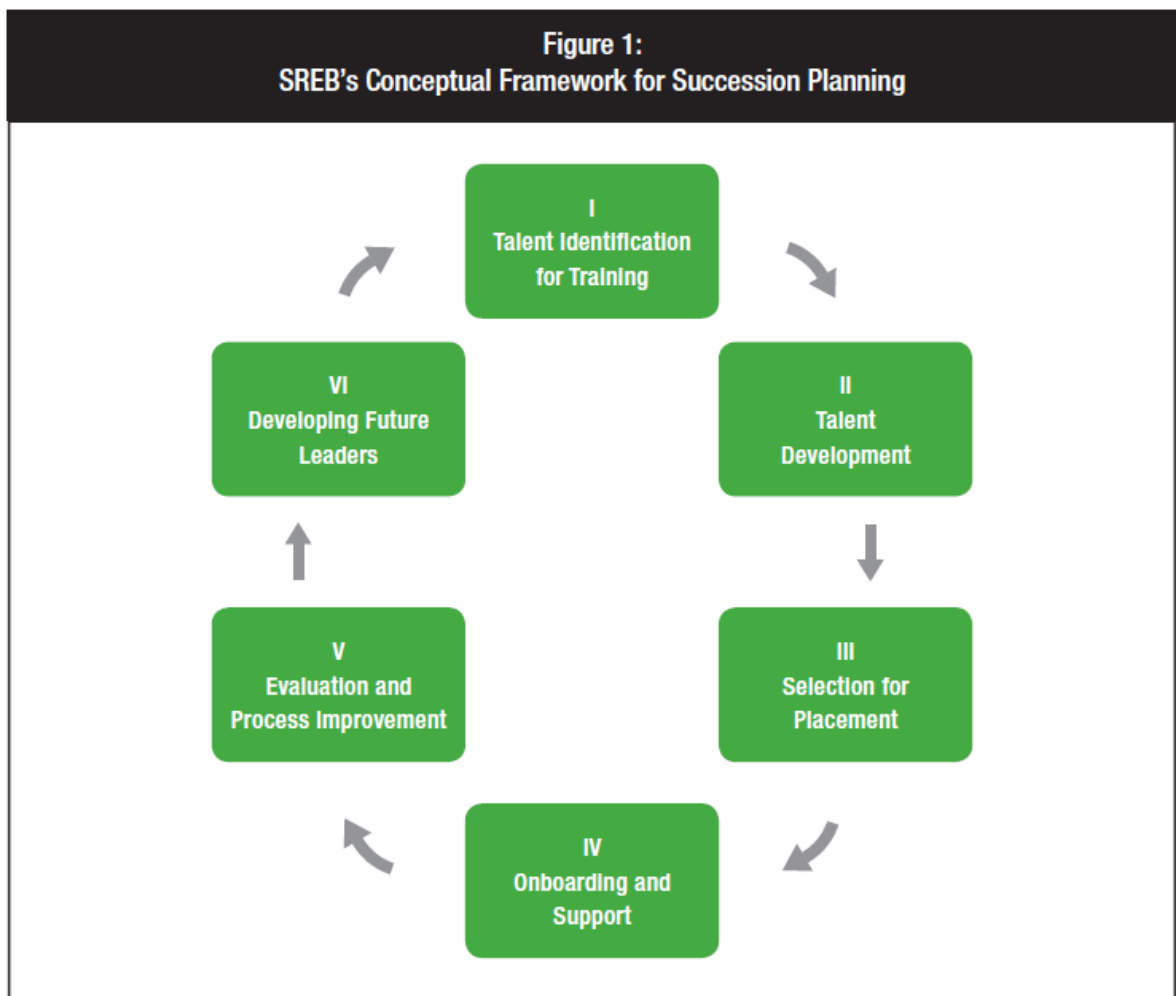
Comprehensive succession planning may be absent in school districts, nonetheless researchers have noticed certain succession practices are more prevalent. Brundrett et al. (2006) commented that, although leadership development may be addressed in schools, there is still a lack of succession planning or succession management. Schools, districts, and even countries have begun initiatives such as leadership development programs, systems of coaching, and the creation of executive principal positions in the hopes of creating larger pools of qualified future leaders (Hargreaves & Fink, 2011). In a study of four Georgia school systems, school district personnel shared positive views regarding the importance of developing aspiring and existing leaders usually through mentoring, either formally or informally (Zepeda et al., 2012). Likewise, three large school districts were able to articulate succession planning strategies although none of them were able to produce an artifact that outlined a comprehensive succession plan (Riddick, 2009). School district size and perceived availability of leaders have influenced the presence of

succession planning characteristics associated with the business sector and other important factors within succession planning such as urgency, mentoring, development of aspiring principals, and partnerships with outside agencies (Zepeda et al., 2012).

As understanding that school leadership matters for the improvement of schools grows, there is a need to stop “hire and hope” practices and engage in better succession practices (Schmidt-Davis, Bottoms, 2011, p. 5). Early calls for action came from Hart (1993), in her seminal study of principal succession, who urged those who appoint and support principals to act deliberately to improve the overall quality of succession processes through purposeful attention to socialization, orientation, professional development, mentoring, and evaluation. Barker (1997) pressed for systematic recruitment, development, coaching, and mentoring for talented individuals and interns plus more transparent personnel practices and clearer roles and career paths for assistant principals.

More recently, the state of Maryland has produced guidance on succession planning for its school districts (Maryland State Department of Education, 2006). The National College for School Leadership (NCSL), which is responsible for training headmasters in the United Kingdom, commissioned a study to explore practices, drivers, and barriers to leadership talent identification, development, succession planning, and retention in response to worries that there will be a shortage of leaders in schools (Brundrett et al., 2006). Riddick (2009) claimed that to increase the effectiveness and coherence of succession planning, states should provide a common comprehensive framework for succession planning and that school district leaders should create written plans that are transparent to all stakeholders. The Southern Regional Education Board

(SREB) has delineated actions that states, school districts, schools, universities, and principals can take to answer the leadership crisis through systematic succession planning (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011). Schmidt-Davis and Bottoms (2011) described succession planning as a virtuous circle which is depicted in Figure 1. More and more individuals, states, and organizations are realizing the need to study succession practices and implement succession strategies as part of a larger system.



*Figure 1.* Southern Regional Education Board's Conceptual Framework for Succession Planning. From Schmidt-Davis, J. & Bottoms, G. (2011). *Who's next? Let's stop gambling on school performance and plan for principal succession*. Atlanta, GA: Southern Regional Education Board.

## **Succession Practices in School Districts**

Educational leaders at the state, school district and school level are responding to the issues of principal succession in a variety of ways that affect school principals at three points in their career: before the principal is hired (practices for preparation, recruitment, and selection); when the principal takes on a new position (onboarding, socialization, and support); and through the principal's career for (sustained retention through professional development and ongoing development). Each of these ideas will be examined in the next section.

### **Preparing, Recruiting, and Selecting Leaders**

#### **Preparation Programs**

One aspect of succession planning, which has been largely ignored by policy makers through the 1980s and 1990s, is improved preparation programs and different options for the preparation and licensing of educational leaders (Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe, & Orr, 2010). Preparation programs, as well as other aspects of leadership development, need to be linked coherently in ways that are future-oriented so principals can become leaders of learning (Fink & Brayman, 2004). This would require an examination of current preparation programs and a redesign of curriculum to address the realities and challenges of today's schools to make programs more relevant to the needs of principals and school districts (Kearney, 2010; Levine, 2005). Levine (2005) offered quality criteria for judging programs that prepare educational leaders. If programs met these criteria, program leaders would recruit students with the motivation and capacity to become effective school leaders, provide programs that reflected the needs of today's leaders, teach curriculum with skills and knowledge needed by leaders at

various stages of their careers and for specific schools, balance coursework and practical experience by integrating theory and practice, and be taught by academics and practitioners who were up to date and experts in school leadership (Levine, 2005).

Some states, universities, and school districts recently have begun to overhaul their systems for preparation and in-service development. Darling-Hammond et al. (2010) studied eight exemplary pre- and in-service principal development programs and recognized that the “clearest generalization that can be made about principal-preparation and development programs is that they are highly variable and depend on where the principal works” (p. 12). Common components of exemplary preparation programs included research-based content, curricular coherence, field-based internships, problem-based learning strategies, cohort structures, mentoring or coaching, and collaboration between universities and school districts. In addition, rigorous recruitment of high-ability candidates, financial support, and state and/or district infrastructures contributed to program effectiveness (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010).

Within succession planning, there is an emphasis on planned, sustained, job-related experiences or practicums and internships within preparation programs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Kearney, 2010). Many programs do not require an internship as part of their program and, for those that do, there was a range of required hours and variation in the intensity of programs (Levine, 2005). In many cases, the internship could be completed within the student’s job and “could be done in the student’s home school or school district. Whether the principal or superintendent there was successful or unsuccessful was immaterial” (Levine, 2005, p. 40). In studying eight programs with stronger affiliations between the school districts and the universities, Orr, King, and

LaPointe (2010) found that many of them included an authentic and lengthier internship even though funding, appropriate mentors, and assessment were barriers to this type of experience. Although there is a desire to provide more meaningful clinical or practical experiences, Levine (2005) concluded that, in general, school leadership programs offer little in the way of meaningful clinical or field-based education even though aspirant school leaders enrolled in these programs want more practice tied to theory in the form of school-based practicums, apprenticeships, study in the field with mentors, mentoring in general, internship opportunities, and instruction involving case studies.

### **Partnerships with Universities And Other Agencies**

To prepare more leaders, school districts have looked to different partnerships to supply their leadership needs (Levine, 2005; McLester, 2011; Orr et al., 2010). In a study of eight urban school districts, Orr et al. (2010) found that school districts were able to better meet their leadership needs when these districts became careful consumers of preparation programs through competition, collaboration, or the creation of their own programs. Partnerships have taken many forms, including partnerships with foundations, non-profit and for-profit agencies, grant recipients, school districts, and universities. These partnerships have been found to strengthen some of the program components by providing financial assistance, paid mentors, highly trained experts to serve as trainers, mentors, and/or college professors to provide in-service professional development (Darling-Hammond et al. 2010).

Universities have been charged with being more responsive to school district needs and encouraged to form partnerships for purposes of selecting and tapping future leadership degree candidates (Harchar & Campbell, 2010). Harchar and Campbell

(2010) reported that a paradigm shift and different actions by both the school districts and the universities would be required for district-university partnerships to be helpful in the succession challenge in a study of school district and university leaders in Louisiana. The university leaders would be required to adjust curriculum and the school district leaders would be required to provide authentic experiences in the form of internships. Harchar and Campbell concluded that there was considerable resistance from both sides in their willingness to make changes and that there was a definite disconnect between university leadership preparation and school district succession planning (Harchar & Campbell, 2010). In another study of district-university partnerships, Orr et al. (2010) recognized that inter-institutional affiliations require in-kind investments, shared goals and objectives, and clear roles and responsibilities. Orr et al. recommended that school district leaders capture the resources of local universities to help meet their leadership development needs and found that school districts and universities benefitted directly (in numbers of program candidates and prepared leaders) and indirectly (better articulation of needed leadership knowledge and competencies to meet local needs). When school districts added high-quality program elements to preparation programs such as more discerning selection, authentic and lengthier internships, and content that emphasized leadership competencies, the school districts had the potential to yield better-prepared candidates to meet the challenges in their schools (Orr et al., 2010).

### **Alternatives to University Preparation Programs**

To address principal supply needs and address some of the concerns regarding preparation programs, states have begun their own preparation programs for educational leaders and created alternative routes that have allowed school districts and other



organizations to prepare school leaders (Levine, 2005). For example, Virginia operated a program that provided additional training, financial incentives, and additional certification as a “turnaround specialist” for a small handful of experienced principals willing to take on the lowest performing schools (Archer, 2005). This program recognized that context and capacity make a difference. Participating school districts agreed to support these principals to make difficult decisions and be able to use resources in unique ways (Archer, 2005). In addition, the program leveraged partnerships with foundations, school districts, and universities and provided more per pupil funding for involved schools, financial incentives to the principals, and additional training through the University of Virginia (Archer, 2005).

### **School District-based Efforts**

In response to shortages of qualified principal candidates, some school districts have looked to alternatives outside of the traditional university preparation programs and adopted practices such as Grow Your Own leadership academies and aspiring principal programs (Joseph, 2009; Zellner, Ward et al., 2002). Grow Your Own programs may be included in a school district’s strategic plan as part of their efforts to recruit and retain a talented workforce and ensure school district support in terms of money and personnel (Joseph, 2009). Grow Your Own programs have sprung up around the country and have been successful in supplying some leadership needs for local school districts. The Del Rio Principals’ Academy relied on training, mentoring, and hands-on projects such as planning and delivering a professional development session to answer recruiting and retention needs along the Mexico-Texas border (Zellner, Ward et al., 2002). Another program, in Colorado, featured an intensive effort to grow and nurture an internal pool of

candidates who were attentive to the needs of individual schools as well as the school district (Vasudeva, 2009). Joseph (2009) claimed that Grow Your Own programs may be more effective than university programs in helping individual school districts solve their leadership crises by being more cost effective, using internal expertise, aligning with school district goals, exposing talented individuals to district administrators, and retaining talented individuals within the district. Orr et al. (2010) disagreed, stating that, while school districts that create their own preparation programs may have greater control over candidate competencies and district-defined preparatory experiences, these programs may be most susceptible to changing leadership and budget conditions since these programs are more costly and time-consuming (Orr et al., 2010).

Grow Your Own programs may be combined with individual leadership development plans or other succession tools. Normore (2007) described a school district with an extensive leadership development plan that took teacher leaders several years to complete. Throughout the process, candidates received professional development and mentoring which these candidates valued as they worked through the Leadership Experiences and Administrative Development (LEAD) program, interim assistant principal program, intern principal program, and then first year principal support program. The leadership development continuum did result in an abundant supply of leaders which is an anomaly for a large urban school district (Normore, 2007). Although some school districts have increased efforts to cultivate talent with Grow Your Own programs or working with local universities, most districts still do not have long-term strategies for improving their candidate pools (Roza, 2003).

## **Recruitment and Selection of Principals**

Traditionally, individuals within education have chosen to pursue leadership training and roles. However, there may be the inherent dangers of relying on self-selection to supply enough qualified leaders since “in decentralised systems, because career development is the prerogative of the applicant, rather than the employer, it is not possible to adopt a planned approach and insufficient well-qualified candidates may submit themselves for scrutiny” (Bush, 2012, p. 671). Many people have proposed more selective entrance for preparation programs (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2008; Levine, 2005; Orr et al., 2010). In recognition that the reliance on potential leaders to self-identify is a risky proposition and that succession planning requires a system-wide approach, the National College of School Leadership (NCSL) has developed and implemented a succession planning program within the United Kingdom (Bush, 2012).

Increasing the active recruitment of teachers with leadership potential to become school leaders is one approach to combat the shortage of leaders. All school leaders should see leadership development as a major part of their leadership role and work collectively to ensure that there are enough school leaders to meet the future demands (Hartle & Thomas, 2006). Potential school leaders should be identified early in their career and given opportunities for leadership and to shadow principals (Zellner, Ward et al., 2002). Myung, Loeb, and Horng (2011) examined the phenomenon of “tapping” which was defined as the practice where current teachers are approached by school leaders to consider leadership and whether tapping encouraged individuals to consider pursuing leadership positions. Myung et al. found that many principals were likely to tap individuals based on leadership competencies: teachers who had demonstrated leadership

capacities and had experiences to be effective leaders. In Miami-Dade County Public Schools principals were more likely to tap male teachers and teachers of their own race (Myung et al., 2011). Since tapping was found to have a significant impact on a teacher's interest in school leadership, Myung et al. encouraged school district leaders to support tapping based on leadership competencies by explicitly defining those competencies and training principals to tap individuals with those characteristics.

Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2008) argued that the non-selective practices of preparation programs should be replaced with early identification and nurturing of teachers with leadership potential along with provisions for supervised experiences within preparation programs. Browne-Ferrigno and Muth recommended the use of performance criteria and practice-oriented preparation experiences to select and equip potential school leaders as they enter preparation programs. Further, Browne-Ferrigno and Muth stated that traditional internships only offer limited experience and that it can take up to three years for candidates to learn skills required for effective practice and become comfortable with the expectations once they have secured a position. Alternative criteria for the selection of program participants might include the requirement of a degree in a curriculum-related field before the pursuit of additional training to become an administrator, more teaching and more leadership experience than is currently required so that candidates might be more mature and have more insights about how to lead schools, and successful work with and through adults, rather than just having served as a leader of children (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2008).

In many school districts, principal hiring takes place without selective or systematic hiring processes. After studying succession planning in Florida, Stutsman

(2007) recommended that school districts desiring to attract and retain well-qualified principals train administrators in the use of a systematic recruitment and selection process that included web-based personnel systems, standardized interview guides, diversity and sensitivity training, and selection based on observation and/or simulation aligned to principal leadership standards. Some states and school districts have begun to use screening tools that measure a principal's motivations and abilities to be successful principals such as Gallup's PrincipalInsight tool and other tools to help place principals in schools that are considered a good match (Mitgang, Gill, & Cummins, 2013). Also, as hiring for turnaround or low performing schools may be even more difficult, Public Impact has developed a school turnaround leadership competency model based on effective past behaviors that Minneapolis Public Schools and the School Turnaround Specialist Program at the University of Virginia have used to guide the selection processes (Steiner & Barrett, 2012). Selection practices that are more selective for entry into preparation programs and for school district leadership positions may enhance the ability of school district leaders to select candidates that are prepared to take on the challenges in their schools.

### **Socializing, Onboarding, and Inducting Leaders**

Both school district leaders and incoming principals can ease the actual succession event through their actions. By prescribing orientation events, activities, and timing, school district leaders can better control the outcomes of principal succession, shape collective experiences for principals, and develop, reinforce, and nurture innovations and new behaviors through existing groups and structures organized by need or level (Hart, 1993). These strategies can be used to emphasize and reinforce valued

leadership styles and norms in the school district and can be used with principals new to the district or principals accepting a new assignment within the district.

Socialization is the learning of social roles as individuals make adjustments and adaptations when they join an existing group (Hart, 1993). Hart (1993) posited that an understanding of socialization “can help shape our understanding of succession and its outcomes” (p. 16). Professional socialization occurs when principals begin preparation programs or become administrators for the first time which is aimed at instilling a conception of the role of principal (Crow, 2006; Hart, 1993). Organizational socialization is context-bound and involves learning the norms, values, and behaviors required in a particular role within a particular organization (Crow, 2006; Hart, 1993). Crow (2006) advocated for a deeper understanding of socialization so that principals could be more successful in the more dynamic and complex contexts of schools. Crow discussed anticipatory and personal socialization in addition to professional and organizational socialization. Anticipatory socialization happens when leaders capitalize on the experiences of teacher leaders prior to any professional socialization for the principalship (Crow, 2006). Personal socialization is the change of self-identity as a person learns the role (Crow, 2006). Each of these types of socialization has taken on new meanings due to the complexities of the current role of principal including changing student demographics, explosion of technology, and interface with different stakeholders (Crow, 2006). Crow also urged school district leaders to re-conceptualize the ways in which they socialized principals so that they stressed connections between the school district and the university, involved teamwork and collaboration, and emphasized the

internship as an opportunity to interact with current principals, complex situations, and student demographics.

The actions of new principals can help them gain credibility and social validation. New principals need to establish themselves quickly as the school leader by practicing consistency, providing clear communication, and demonstrating congruence between words and actions (Meyer et al., 2009). “Skill and knowledge are important facets of legitimacy in new leaders” (Hart, 1993, p. 278) and new principals should look for opportunities to visibly demonstrate the knowledge and skills that were valued and needed in the new setting to staff and community since not taking advantage of opportunities or simply poorly executing a memo, assembly, or staff meeting could undermine the principal’s success. A new principal can also spend time understanding the individual beliefs, values, skills, and expectations of the staff, synthesize these into patterns for valuable insight into the existing culture, and use these insights and past experiences to inform choices to move toward new goals (Hart, 1993).

Mascall and Leithwood (2010) recommended that school district leaders encourage incoming principals to understand and respect the school improvement efforts that were already underway in schools experiencing rapid principal turnover, unless the school is in need of turnaround. Similarly, Meyer et al. (2009) observed that careful attention to specific practices by the successor principal and school district minimized the negative effects of succession on the school culture and helped boost teacher morale which was critically important during and after a principal succession event.

### **Induction**

States and school districts are encouraged to establish induction programs with clear goals aligned with administrator standards, implement coaching for at least the first

year for new principals, collect data and evidence of effective programs, and commit funding to sustaining induction programs (Kearney, 2010) so that new principals are more successful and stay in the job longer. Induction is defined as “a multiyear process for individuals at the beginning of their careers or new to a role or setting and is designed to enhance professional effectiveness and foster continued growth during a time of intense learning” (Villani, 2006, p. 18). Support for new principals can include well-trained mentors, networking opportunities, and focused training on leading student achievement (Hart, 1993; Kearney, 2010). Professional standards can provide the basis for the professional knowledge that new administrators need for successful entry into the profession which can guide induction programs also (CCSSO, 2008).

The needs of new principals can be addressed when induction and mentoring programs pay attention to the developmental needs of principals (Villani, 2006) as theorized by the professional socialization hierarchy developed by Parkay, Currie, and Rhodes (1992). According to Parkay et al., professional socialization occurs as principals move through the following stages: Stage 1 Survival, Stage 2 Control, Stage 3 Stability, Stage 4 Educational Leadership, and Stage 5 Professional Actualization. Although not every new principal enters at Stage 1 or moves through the stages at the same rate, principals start with positional power granted through their appointment and gain personal power as they legitimate themselves through their leadership characteristics and commitment. Moreover, as principals move through the stages, they become less concerned about restricting the actions of others (coercive leadership) and become more open to facilitating the learning and growth of themselves and others. A primary goal of induction and mentoring programs is to move new principals through Stages 1 and 2



quickly so that the principal will become more competent and respected and can grow in their effectiveness (Villani, 2006).

### **Mentoring and Coaching**

School district personnel can support principals by providing coaching for administrators when they enter the profession plus ongoing formal and informal mentoring for school leaders (Barker, 1997). Although traditionally recognized as a dominant strategy inside induction programs, mentoring or coaching is defined as a support where “a more experienced educator observes and offers productive feedback to a less experienced educator” (Kearney, 2010, p. 16). Mentoring can benefit a school district’s efforts to recruit, hire, train, and retain school principals and should be part of a program for training and inducting aspiring and new leaders into principal and assistant principal positions (Stutsman, 2007). Furthermore, lack of mentoring and opportunities for support in the initial stages of leadership development was identified as a reason for unsuccessful campus leadership (Zellner, Jenkins, Gideon, Doughty, & McNamara, 2002).

In a study of the effects of principal coaching on novice principals, novice principals perceived that coaching provided them valuable support and experience to be successful in their jobs (James-Ward, 2013). Three themes that school districts should heed when developing coaching programs were using experienced neutral coaches, principal and coach collaboration around key leadership and practical day-to-day practices, and developing principal efficacy and skills. James-Ward determined that coaching can help new principals feel that their job is manageable and perhaps help with the retention and job satisfaction of principals.

## **Retaining Leaders**

### **Importance of Principal Training**

While training and development for principals was largely overlooked in various reform movements of the past two decades, there is a growing awareness of the need to provide quality ongoing professional development and support for principals if student outcomes are to improve (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010). Only a small fraction of principals are well trained to lead improvement efforts especially where the challenges of the principalship are exacerbated such as in culturally diverse, low income communities (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010). National and state legislators have recognized the need for specialized training, recruitment, and mentoring of school principals, especially in underperforming schools. The School Leadership Program operated by the U.S. Department of Education has provided 29 million dollars in grants to support the development, enhancement, or expansion of innovative leadership programs such as Project ALL in Virginia, New York City Leadership Academy, and New Leaders for New Schools (Aarons, 2010) and proposed amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) could help local education agencies develop leadership training programs in high-need schools (Congressional Research Service, 2013).

### **Ongoing Professional Development**

Ongoing professional development and support is important to curb principal turnover and failure. Zellner, Ward et al. (2002) recommended mentoring, peer support, and systematic professional renewal including seminars, university/school collaboratives, and partnerships as components for preparing and sustaining leaders for longevity. Ongoing training covering a broad range of topics and skills coupled with specialized

training, performance evaluation, and other learning is required to develop leaders (Kearney, 2010). In studying in-service programs for principals, Darling-Hammond et al. (2010) found that exemplary programs developed a comprehensive approach that allowed principals to connect learning to practice, provided a continuum of learning experiences from induction to the engagement of retired principals as mentors, and focused on collective development by creating leadership learning communities of practice.

Quality professional development may provide an avenue for the retention of principals. When school leaders experienced exemplary preparation and/or in-service leadership development programs, they reported being more prepared to improve instruction and lead school improvement efforts and had more positive attitudes about the principalship (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010). Furthermore, when principals participated in professional growth and renewal activities, reflected on their practice, were members of a peer support group, and mentored teacher leaders into leadership roles, they reported being more satisfied with their jobs (Zellner, Ward et al., 2002). CCSSO (2008) recommended the use of professional standards to guide the professional development of administrators as well as assist with improving working conditions. They claimed that the ISLLC standards could serve as the foundation for realigning principal roles and responsibilities, defining requirements for advanced certification and incentives, and helping administrators reach professional goals.

One element of support for aspiring, new, or practicing principals is an individual development plan, a practice borrowed from business succession literature. Individual development plans tie professional goals with professional development, become part of annual performance reviews, clarify school district expectations, set targets, and define

support mechanisms for leader development (Kearney, 2010). In a study of an initiative that paired teacher leaders or assistant principals with principal mentors and provided ongoing training, participants valued the development of a professional development plan which included reflection on practice, campus research, and a needs assessment (Zellner, Ward et al., 2002).

### **Rotation**

As part of the succession process, “transfer and rotation procedures refer to any official policy or instructional mechanism for regulating leadership succession” (White & Cooper, 2011, p. 1). Rotation of school leaders has been a practice to improve the growth of school leaders and provide leaders with different opportunities. However, district-level rotation practices or policies may add to the problem of principal turnover (Mascall & Leithwood, 2010) and have negative, unanticipated consequences that may end up sabotaging initiatives that the school district is trying to implement (Macmillan et al., 2011). Macmillan et al. (2011) concluded that, where administrator rotation was practiced, teachers were slow and skeptical to implement initiatives proposed by the new principal. Likewise, Fink and Brayman (2004) advocated that school districts make efforts to maintain stability in times of rapidly changing initiatives since rotation causes more problems than it solves: leaders had difficulty forming relationships and engaging staff in meaningful ways, plus important improvements often disappeared (Fink & Brayman, 2004). It is recommended that school district leaders leave principals in positions for at least four years, preferably five to seven years (Louis et al., 2010; Mascall & Leithwood, 2010). Instead of systematic rotation, school district personnel are encouraged to adopt practices that lead to sustainable leadership including training,

support, and encouragement for staff carrying out shared leadership (Mascall & Leithwood, 2010), keeping successful leaders in schools longer, slowing down the rate of succession, and making succession plans as part of school improvement planning (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004).

### **Other Supportive Practices**

School district leaders continue to search for ways to improve the retention of principals. Some school districts have initiated professional networks (Zellner, Ward et al., 2002). Other school districts have changed the way that they are supervising and supporting principals such as Denver Public Schools which has changed the focus for the personnel that supervise principals, as well as limited the number of principals each person can supervise (Gill, 2013). Former principals that possess the needed content and leadership expertise serve as supervisors who visit schools at least once every two weeks. Denver Public Schools hopes this type of ongoing support will impact student achievement in positive ways. Still other school districts focus on developing assistant principals beyond the narrowly defined duties or traditional 4 Bs (bells, behavior, books, and bats) (Zellner, Jinkins et al., 2002) and insist that assistant principals learn and experience all aspects of school leadership including instructional leadership (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011). Aspiring principals need a mentor, leadership role models, and the opportunity to see exemplary leaders at work, as well as the opportunity to reflect on their leadership (Zellner, Jinkins et al., 2002).

### **Developing Future Leaders**

Incumbent leadership actions can help or hinder leadership succession planning. Good teamwork and a commitment to professional learning within a school have helped

leadership develop and ensured a pool of talent (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009). Grachinsky (2008) recommended that current principals take an active role in preparing the school for their eventual succession by establishing a vision and culture of learning and by building leadership capacity through distributed leadership practices which could provide a smooth transition for the successor principal. Brundrett et al. (2006) stressed the importance of senior leaders at a school-level taking an active role in leadership development by creating a talent pool, encouraging staff to take on new roles, and developing a culture of leadership distribution. Current leaders have to commit to help sustain effective leadership for their schools and school districts by cultivating sustainable leadership, grooming successors, planning, and preparing for succession (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004). Schmidt-Davis and Bottoms (2011) recommended that states incorporate the development of future school leaders and teacher leaders as a professional responsibility within principal evaluation standards. School district leaders can then hold principals accountable for identifying and developing future leaders. Principals can develop leaders through the distribution of leadership and responsibility (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004) and also by serving as a mentor (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011) completing the circle of succession practices from preparation through individual development to the development of others.

### **Colorado Context Regarding Principal Succession**

Colorado has at eleven private and public higher education institutions with principal preparation programs (Colorado Department of Higher Education [CDHE], 2013). For the academic year 2011-2012, CDHE reported that 393 people completed a principal preparation program in 2012 and that 859 students were enrolled in principal

preparation programs in 2012, up from 690 in 2008 (CDHE, 2013). In a study to make licensure more effective in Colorado, researchers recommended revamping the system of initial licensing and renewal for all credentialed school personnel by removing barriers and costs, basing renewal on demonstrated performance rather than continuing education, and developing a pre-service performance assessment (Abramson et al., 2012).

According to CDHE, Colorado currently allows alternative licensure in order to decrease the number of people employed with emergency authorizations and to recruit and employ nontraditional candidates. Eighteen principals enrolled in a state-approved alternative programs during the 2010-2011 year (CDHE, 2013).

Colorado has newly adopted Quality Teacher and Principal Standards created by the Colorado Educator Effectiveness Act of 2010 to which preparation programs started aligning in 2011 (CDHE, 2013). With full implementation of this legislation, in the coming years it may be possible to tie each educator's effectiveness rating back to their preparing institution through the Educator Identifier System (CDHE, 2013). This may allow preparing institutions to make program improvements based on educator effectiveness, although it will be several years before the state will be able to collect and report effectiveness details (CDHE, 2013).

### **Colorado Principals**

There are over 2,500 principals and assistant principals in the state of Colorado (Colorado Department of Education [CDE], 2012c). The average salaries, experience, and preparation of US public school principals for the 2011-12 school year and for Colorado for Fall 2011 and Fall 2012 are displayed in Table 1. Wide variation of salaries exist within the state. CDE (2012d) reported that the average principal salary was lower

for rural areas (\$63,709) as opposed to higher salaries for the Denver Metro area (\$83,279). Principal salaries were also lowest for school districts with less than 300 students (\$57,713) and highest for school districts with 6,000 to 25,000 students (\$84,221) (CDE, 2012e). There is a rather large pay differential between teachers and principals. The average teacher salary reported in Fall 2012 was \$49,118, with a daily rate of \$268.17, working 183 days compared to \$80,281 average salary for principals, with a daily rate of \$383.96, working 209 days (CDE, 2012c, 2012g). In addition, there is wide variation in the principal turnover rates. Many small school districts with only one or two administrators may experience 0% or 100% turnover depending on the year. The principal turnover rates are shown for Colorado for Fall 2011 which shows head count changes from 2010-11 to 2011-12 and Fall 2012 which shows head count changes from 2011-12 to 2012-13 in Table 2.

Table 1

*Principal Demographics*

	US Public Schools 2011-12	Colorado Fall 2011	Colorado Fall 2012
Number of Principals	89,819	2,669.5	2,806
Annual Salary	\$90,500	\$81,196	\$80,281
Daily Rate	-	\$387.88	\$383.96
Number of Contract Days	-	209	209
Average Age	48	46	46
% with MA or higher	97.8	86.7	86.2
Years of Instate Teaching Experience	-	8.03	7.53
Years of Instate Education Experience	-	12.04	11.34

*Note.* US public school principal information obtained from Bitterman, A., Goldring, R., & Gray, L. (2013). *Characteristics of public and private elementary and secondary school principals in the United States: Results from the 2011-12 Schools and Staffing Survey. First look.* (NCES 2013-313). National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED544176>. Colorado information obtained from Colorado Department of Education report: Full-time equivalence (FTE), average salary, and average experience of principals/Asst./ Assoc. (105, 106) level of experience. (CDE, 2011a, 2012c)



Table 2

*Colorado Principal Turnover Information*

	Fall 2011	Fall 2012
Prior Year Principals	2,703	2,727
Current Year Principals	2,727	2,831
Number Left	508	455
Number New	532	559
Turnover Rate	18.79	16.69%

*Note.* Number Left = the number people that are no longer employed in that category in the district in the current year. They were employed in prior year. Number New = the number of people that are new to the position at that district for the current year. Turnover rate = the number of people that left divided by the number of people employed in the prior year. Information obtained from CDE Personnel Turnover Rates by District and Position Categories (CDE, 2011b, 2012f)

**2013 Colorado Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning Survey**

The Colorado Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning (TELL) Survey was administered to Colorado educators in 2009, 2011, and 2013 (NTC, 2013d). In early 2013, which would correspond to principal count from Fall 2012 as reported by CDE, 60,892 Colorado school-based educators were surveyed (NTC, 2013d). Over 33,000 educators responded yielding a response rate of 54.52%. TELL Colorado reported individual question results for 112 or 61% of Colorado school districts that had a response rate of at least 40% (NTC, 2013d).

In analyzing the TELL Colorado results, researchers identified “stayers” (teachers who intended to remain teaching in their current schools) and “movers” (teachers who intended to remain teaching but not in their current schools) (NTC, 2013c). Boyd et al.’s (2011) conclusion that policies aimed at improving school administration might help teacher retention seem apparent in the 2013 TELL Colorado results since stayers reported a higher rate of agreement on every question of the survey (NTC, 2013c). In addition, the gap between the rate of agreement among stayers and movers was large on several items concerning school leadership including effective school leadership (36.6 %

difference), school leadership support of teachers (36.6% difference), and the school as a good place to work and learn (41.1% difference; NTC, 2013c).

When Colorado respondents were surveyed about their immediate career intentions, 79% of teachers indicated that they would remain teaching in their current school (NTC, 2013e). When asked to identify which aspect of their teaching conditions most affected their willingness to keep teaching at their school, School Leadership was the top choice from among the following choices: time during the work day, facilities and resources, community support and involvement, managing student conduct, teacher leadership, school leadership, professional development, and instructional practices and support (NTC, 2013e). Twenty-nine percent of Colorado participants chose School Leadership as the reason as compared to 18% who chose Instructional Practices and Support and less percentages for the other remaining factors (NTC, 2013e). The NTC concluded that positive teaching conditions were important factors in deciding to continue teaching in a school and that “Specifically, the TELL data indicate teachers intending to remain in their current assignments report strong School Leadership compared to teachers who intend to leave their current schools” (NTC, 2013c, p. 4).

While there are several questions regarding school leadership on the TELL Survey, two questions regarding overall teacher satisfaction are of interest to this study. Question 7.4 asked respondents to agree or disagree with the following statement: “Overall, the school leadership in my school is effective.” The rate of agreement which included responses of “agree” or “strongly agree” was 72.8% across the state (NTC, 2013e). Likewise, the rate of agreement for question 10.6 which stated “Overall, my school is a good place to work and learn” was 82.7% (NTC, 2013e). These two questions

provided overall teacher perception data of the school and school leadership and will be used as part of the sampling procedure for this study described in the next chapter.

### **Conclusion**

Principal succession is a complex social phenomenon that can affect school climate, teacher retention, and student achievement. There has been a lack of focused attention on succession in schools although succession practices have been beneficial within the business sector. Succession practices can be seen as a circle that includes the selection and preparation of leaders, the socialization and induction of leaders, and the retention of leaders. In this chapter, I described many of the succession practices that are recommended throughout the literature. Colorado is a state with a wide variety of school districts and no known statewide efforts to address succession issues. The result is a gap in the literature that indicates a need to study succession practices in select school districts in Colorado from the perspective of principals and school district administrators so as to illuminate principal succession practices and provide useful insights to other district leaders, policy makers, and others regarding the retention of high quality principals.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

In this chapter, I delineate the methodology that I used to explore principal succession policies and practices in selected Colorado school districts. In the literature review in the last chapter, I illustrated that principals exert considerable influence over a school in terms of climate, staff morale, and, ultimately, student achievement (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010; Macmillan et al. 2011). In addition, principal turnover is disruptive to schools (Hart, 1993). Yet, there is a high turnover rate among school principals and a perceived lack of quality principal candidates that can provide the leadership necessary for school improvement (Roza, 2003). Likewise, school districts often lack systematic practices for recruiting, inducting, and retaining school principals (Mascall, Monroe, Jantzi, Walker, & Sacks, 2011). Succession planning can help organizations fill leadership needs now and in the future, while also furthering organizational goals (Rothwell, 2010), such as student achievement in the case of schools. Finally, minimal research has been conducted in the area of school district succession practices (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009). This qualitative study attempted to illuminate the nature, characteristics, and practices of principal succession leading to principal retention within several Colorado school districts.

### **Restatement of the Problem**

The need for high quality, highly trained instructional leaders who can improve teaching and learning and who will stay in a principal position for several years has never been more apparent than it is today. The effects of the principal on student learning and school improvement are widely documented (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Louis et al., 2010; Murphy, Elliot, Goldring, & Porter, 2006). In addition, many state and school district leaders have expressed concern over the difficulty in hiring principals (Roza, 2003). Teacher satisfaction with regard to working conditions has also been linked to the quality of school leadership (New Teacher Center [NTC], 2013c). Succession is a complex phenomenon that some have envisioned as a virtuous circle when state, district, and principals take action (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011). However, very few school districts have spent time and energy creating succession plans (Hargreaves & Fink, 2011) to ensure that they mitigate the negative effects that a change in building leadership can have on a school and its students' achievement.

Since there were limited qualitative studies regarding the perceptions of school district staff and principals as they transition into a new position and very few studies exploring what systems are in place in school districts, it was appropriate to delve into succession practices in selected Colorado districts with higher principal retention and teacher satisfaction rates. By capturing the perceptions of both principals and those who hire and supervise them at the district level, a description was formulated that might be used by other educational leaders to strengthen their succession practices and policies.

### **Research Questions**

To gain a more in-depth understanding of school district practices for principal succession, the focus of this study was embedded in the following questions:

- Q1     What are the principal succession practices of large school districts with high teacher satisfaction as reported on the TELL Colorado Survey when controlling for student demographics?
- Q2     What are the principal succession practices of large school districts with high principal retention rates when controlling for student demographics?
- Q3     What are the policies and practices that school district employees believe influence the retention of principals?

### **Qualitative Research Design**

In this study I examined the phenomenon of principal succession through the eyes of the participants, predominantly, the administrators who implement these practices and the principals who are the recipients of these practices. Qualitative designs are appropriate if a researcher wants to understand the phenomenon and “examine themes, patterns, and trends focusing on the meaning that participants, rather than what the researcher or literature, ascribe to the issue” (Creswell, 2007, p. 39). In addition, qualitative designs help the researcher to develop a complex picture by reporting multiple perspectives, identifying the factors involved and presenting the larger picture as it evolves (Creswell, 2007).

I used a constructivist perspective for this study. “Constructivists study the multiple realities constructed by people and the implications of those constructions for their lives and interactions” (Patton, 2002, p. 96). In line with constructivism is the idea that all understandings are contextually embedded, limited, and interpersonally forged and that two people can live in the same world and have very different worldviews

(Patton, 2002). From a constructionist, interpretative perspective the researcher must study the meanings, intentions, and actions of the participants (Charmaz, 2001). True to a constructivist perspective, I interviewed different stakeholders as I assumed that these different stakeholders would have different experiences and perceptions of a program, all of which deserved attention, and all of which were experienced as real (Patton, 2002). I tried to capture these perspectives through open-ended interviews and explain these perspectives through the participants' words in my analyses. Phenomena can only be understood within the context in which they are studied, and, thus, neither findings, problems, nor solutions from one context can be generalized to another (Patton, 2002). Therefore, I explored and illuminated understandings regarding succession but the findings are not intended to be generalizable.

I illustrated the nature, characteristics, and practices of school districts regarding principal succession. By conducting interviews with school district principals and administrators who hire and support them, I attempted to comprehend the phenomenon from their perspectives. I coded the data in a way that provided an in-depth understanding of succession while considering the multiple external forces that shape this phenomenon (Creswell, 2015). Furthermore, the data was collected and analyzed throughout the study, rather than examined at the end, allowing me to ask questions and verify the data through constant comparative procedures (Creswell, 2008; Merriam, 2009).

Given that succession practices in Colorado have not been studied and that succession is a complex social and organizational phenomenon, a qualitative approach was suitable for this study. Congruent with the inductive nature of qualitative research, I

assumed a flexible and open approach, as I followed the leads gained from the data, thus allowing categories to emerge from the data (Charmaz, 2001). I coded the data throughout the data collection process using open coding and then axial coding. As the study progressed, I continued analyzing the relationships among the categories using the constant comparative method of data analysis (Merriam, 2009).

### **Research Setting and Participants**

When conducting qualitative research, the researcher must select sites and individuals which will purposely inform and enhance the understanding of the central phenomenon of the study (Creswell, 2007). Using a combination of sampling strategies based on a review of the literature, I included several school districts for this qualitative case study. The following paragraphs provide the rationale and criteria that was used by the researcher to select the research setting and participants.

The research setting chosen was the state of Colorado because it is state with a strong history of local control by school district leaders and without coordinated efforts to recruit, train, or retain well-qualified principals. Colorado has 178 diverse school districts with large, medium, and small student populations located in rural, suburban, and urban settings. In Colorado, there are several principal preparation programs, alternative licensure routes for principal candidates, and newly adopted principal performance standards that all may affect the supply and demand of principals (Roza, 2003) and, thus, affect principal succession practices. Finally, the results of this research were important to the university and researcher which are both located in Colorado. The University of Northern Colorado maintains one of the state's eleven traditional principal preparation programs and also has worked with local school districts to help them satisfy



their leadership needs. The researcher works in a school district which has partnered with the university to support three principal preparation cohorts of current school district employees nominated by their principal or self-nominated. Many of the cohort students have secured leadership positions as instructional coaches, district coordinators, assistant principals, and principals. Identification and preparation of future leaders is just one component of succession planning that has been enhanced through planning and this partnership. It was hoped that this study would help identify other ways to augment a school district's ability to enhance its succession practices.

### **Sampling Strategy for School Districts for Inclusion In the Study**

Given the challenges of the principal position, it is logical to conclude that school districts with high principal satisfaction could provide rich cases for study. However, there is currently no uniform measure of principal satisfaction for individual Colorado school districts. Principal perceptions of working conditions related to satisfaction were measured in the state of Colorado through the Colorado Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning Survey (TELL) Survey in 2009, 2011, and 2013 (NTC, 2013b). Over 700 Colorado principals answered the survey in 2013 and TELL Colorado reported principal perceptions regarding time, facilities and resources, school leadership, teacher leadership, professional development, and new principal support (NTC, 2013e). However, no overall satisfaction results were reported and results were only reported on a statewide level as to protect the anonymity of the principals (NTC, 2013b).

I reviewed the literature to determine factors to consider when purposely choosing school districts for consideration in this qualitative study regarding principal succession.

This review of the literature supported using the following four factors when choosing school districts for participation: (1) size of district since it may indicate the need for succession practices (Roza, 2003; Zepeda, Bengston, & Parylo, 2012); (2) student demographics since schools and school districts with more challenging student populations have been tied to more principal mobility (Battle, 2010; Baker et al., 2010); (3) teacher satisfaction, especially in regard to school administration, since teacher satisfaction has been connected to school leadership (Boyd et al., 2011); and (4) principal retention rates given that principal retention has been linked to school improvement and overall school climate (Louis, et al., 2010) and that retention may be an indication of working conditions (Boyd et al., 2011).

In order to select information-rich cases which could inform understandings of the phenomenon of principal succession, school districts for this study were chosen through a combination of criterion, maximum variation, and theory-based sampling. It was also hoped that this purposeful selection of people and places could help me, as the researcher, best understand the phenomenon of principal succession (Creswell, 2008). The next section explains the rationale and process that I used to select school districts for inclusion in the study.

First, using criteria sampling, I determined characteristics of possible school districts for inclusion in the study. In the Fall of 2012, there were 178 school districts that ranged in size from one district that served 10 students to one that served over 82,000 students located in rural, town, and urban areas (CDE, 2012 K-12 Pupil Count). Zepeda et al. (2012) determined that large school districts may have more of a need and urgency for succession planning. Likewise, Roza (2003) concluded that small, rural school

districts were generally not concerned about principal turnover since officials usually had time to groom successors. Therefore, large Colorado school districts defined as those with over 5,000 K-12 students and over 350 licensed, school-based professionals were given consideration. Next, school districts with at least 40% participation rate on the TELL Colorado Survey were considered since TELL reports detailed results regarding teacher satisfaction for individual districts meeting this threshold (NTC, 2013e). Of the 30 Colorado school districts who met the size criterion, 22 school districts also met the TELL participation criterion and were included as possible districts for this study.

In order to minimize the effects that student demographics might have on principal mobility and teacher satisfaction and possibly find cases that could illuminate understandings regarding principal succession, I employed a maximal variation sampling strategy since the remaining 22 school districts differ on several factors. Maximum variation sampling “increases the likelihood that the findings will reflect differences or different perspectives (Creswell, 2007, p. 126) and is intended to capture central themes that cut across a great deal of variation (Patton, 2002). I wanted to make sure that school districts with different student demographics were included in the sample. Two kinds of findings are possible using maximum variation sampling: high quality, detailed descriptions of each case and important shared patterns that cut across cases (Patton, 2002). These common themes may take on greater importance because they emerge despite the variation of the cases (Patton, 2002) and will hopefully lead to a rich description of succession practices.

Several studies have linked principal mobility to student demographics (Battle, 2010; Baker et al., 2010; Roza, 2003). To minimize the possibility that higher principal

retention and teacher satisfaction rates were merely a reflection of less challenging student demographics, I calculated a demographic score for each of the 22 school districts using the Fall 2012 October Student Count data obtained from CDE's website. The demographic score (DS) equaled the percent of students who received free and reduced lunch (FRL) benefits plus the percent of students who received special education services (ESS) plus the percent of students who were classified as English language learners (EL):

$$DS = \% FRL + \% ESS + \% EL.$$

FRL was used as a proxy for socio-economic status since it is calculated using a family's income in relation to poverty (USDA Food and Nutrition Service, 2013).

In Table 3 is student demographic information, the demographic score, and the TELL Colorado Survey participation for the 22 Colorado school districts considered for this study. When the 22 school districts were sorted into three roughly equal groups by the DS, seven school districts fell into the group with less than average student demographic factors, eight school districts into the group with average student demographic factors, and seven school districts into the group with above average student demographic factors. Calculations for the entire state of Colorado placed the state in the "average" group.

Table 3

*Colorado School Districts with at Least 5,000 Students and at Least 40% Participation on the 2013 Colorado Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning Survey*

	Fall 2012 Pupil Information					2013 TELL Colorado Survey Results		
	K-12 Pupil Count	% K-12 FRL	% PK-12 ESS	% PK-12 EL	Demographic Score	Site-based Licensed Educators	Survey Respondents	% Participation
State School District	833,186	41.91	9.77	14.44	66.12	60,892	33,200	54.52
D1	82,530	34.40	8.90	7.32	50.62	5,757	4,064	70.59
D2	63,044	11.61	9.60	3.82	25.03	3,752	2,689	71.67
D3	51,765	25.59	10.12	10.45	46.16	3,740	1,967	52.59
D4	42,428	37.17	9.19	16.47	62.83	2,663	1,647	61.85
D5	38,355	68.20	10.30	39.01	117.51	2,675	1,344	50.24
D6	29,280	18.44	9.49	9.64	37.56	2,264	1,242	54.86
D7	28,319	54.23	7.83	9.83	71.89	2,116	1,667	78.78
D8	28,182	33.23	10.01	14.60	57.83	1,834	1,397	76.17
D9	27,121	29.36	7.90	6.97	44.23	1,934	1,418	73.32
D10	21,099	45.17	10.69	5.28	61.14	1,427	1,200	84.09
D11	16,669	70.39	12.55	6.49	89.43	1,148	823	71.69
D12	15,669	33.62	9.63	14.24	57.49	926	703	75.92
D13	15,479	37.32	11.51	3.29	52.12	1,235	964	78.06
D14	15,181	20.79	8.68	5.65	35.12	1,005	671	66.77
D15	9,517	82.40	11.88	40.55	134.83	653	512	78.41
D16	8,883	44.37	13.99	2.31	60.68	623	349	56.02
D17	8,826	43.04	11.55	3.47	58.06	576	234	40.62
D18	7,649	72.47	9.95	33.87	116.29	453	352	77.7
D19	6,931	83.15	11.21	43.72	138.08	529	439	82.99
D20	5,895	54.01	10.33	16.95	81.29	405	266	65.68
D21	5,250	45.56	8.22	29.64	83.42	452	349	77.21
D22	5,076	46.95	10.59	7.99	65.53	353	147	41.64

*Note.* FRL = Students who qualify for free or reduced lunch, ESS = Students receiving special education services, EL = students identified as English language learners. Demographic Score = % of K-12 FRL students + % of PK-12 ESS students + % of PK-12 EL students. Data was obtained from the Colorado Department of Education Fall 2012 K-12 Free and Reduced Lunch Eligibility by District and County and the Colorado Department of Education Fall 2012 Pupil Membership by County, District, and Instructional Program (CDE, 2012a, 2012b) at url: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/rv2012pmlinks>; and 2013 TELL Colorado Results at url: <http://www.tellcolorado.org/results>

Finally, I employed theory-based sampling in which the researcher samples cases based on their potential manifestation or representation of important theoretical constructs (Patton, 2002). In order to answer the first research question, I reviewed teacher satisfaction data to determine one school district in each demographic group to

investigate. Data for teacher satisfaction factor were obtained from the TELL Colorado website using the percent of teachers from the 2013 survey who strongly agreed or agreed with Question 7.4 (Overall, the school leadership in my school is effective), the percent of teachers who answered “continue teaching at my current school” to Question 10.1 (Which of the following best describes your immediate professional plans?), and the percent of teachers who strongly agreed or agreed to Question 10.6 (Overall, my school is a good place to work and learn). The percentages were totaled and averaged.

The school districts within each demographic band with the highest TELL factor score were asked to participate. Calculations are shown in Table 4 which result in the identification of School District 9 (less than average student demographic factors), School District 22 (average student demographic factors), and School District 20 (higher than average student demographic factors) for possible inclusion in the study. I established the following protocol in case one of the three school districts declined participation in the study: I would seek permission from the district with the second highest TELL factor score within the same demographic band. School district leaders in all three of the selected school districts agreed to participate in the study.

Table 4

*2013 Colorado Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning Survey Results for 22 Colorado School Districts Organized Within Student Demographic Bands*

	Demo- graphic Score	2013 TELL Colorado Survey				
		% Agreement Leadership Satisfaction	% “Continue at School”	% Agreement Overall Satisfaction	Total of 3 Questions	Average of 3 Questions
State	66.12	72.8	79	82.7	234.5	78.17
School Districts with Less than Average Student Demographic Factors						
D2	25.03	79.6	71	84.7	235.3	78.43
D3	46.16	69.6	82	83.7	235.3	78.43
D1	50.62	76	82	86	244	81.33
D13	52.12	79.1	83	88.6	250.7	83.57
D6	37.56	75.5	89	88	252.5	84.17
D14	35.12	78.9	89	86.5	254.4	84.80
D9	44.23	79	87	89	255	85.00
School Districts with Average Student Demographic Factors						
D4	62.83	68.8	69	78.8	216.6	72.20
D16	60.68	71	74	85.6	230.6	76.87
D7	71.89	73.8	74	83.1	230.9	76.97
D17	58.06	66.7	82	84.8	233.5	77.83
D12	57.49	70.8	81	82	233.8	77.93
D10	61.14	71	79	85	235	78.33
D8	57.83	69.1	83	83.3	235.4	78.47
D22	65.53	80.6	81	85.2	246.8	82.27
School Districts with Higher than Average Student Demographic Factors						
D5	117.51	56.6	71	66.4	194	64.67
D19	138.08	65.5	75	69	209.5	69.83
D18	116.29	69.7	69	76.3	215	71.67
D11	89.43	69.6	73	76.9	219.5	73.17
D15	134.83	72.2	83	77.7	232.9	77.63
D21	83.42	68.9	85	82.3	236.2	78.73
D20	81.29	75.8	83	86.2	245	81.67

*Note.* Demographic Score = % of K-12 students receiving free or reduced lunch benefits + % of PK-12 students receiving special education services + % of PK-12 students who are identified as English language learners reported by CDE. Percent Agreement Satisfaction with Leadership = Percent of respondents who chose agree or strongly agree to Question 7.4: Overall, the school leadership in my school is effective. Percent “Continue at School” = Percent of respondents who chose “Continue Teaching at My Current School” for Question 10.1: Which of the following best describes your immediate professional plans? Percent Agreement Overall Satisfaction = Percent of respondents who chose agree or strongly agree to Question 10.6: Overall, my school is a good place to work and learn. Information obtained from 2013 TELL Colorado Results at url: <http://www.tellcolorado.org/results>

Principal retention may be an indicator of quality succession practices and was used to answer the second research question. Data for principal retention were obtained from the CDE's website using the 2012-13 Staff Turnover Report Final which reported the principal retention rate between the 2011-12 and the 2012-13 school years. CDE calculates principal turnover rate by taking the number of principals that left the principalship in the same school district in a given year divided by the number of principals employed in the principal category in the prior year (CDE, 2014). This simple calculation does not differentiate the reason for the departure and, thus, may include retirements, reassignment to another job category (i.e. teacher or district administrator), voluntary departures, and non-renewal of contracts. Voluntary departure motives may include salary, working conditions, or changing political climate. This rate is also calculated yearly and may be sensitive to local forces such as an early retirement incentive or changing organizational priorities. However, since the principal turnover rate was calculated the same for every school district across the state, I selected the district with the highest principal retention rates within each of the same three demographic bands. The principal retention rate for the state of Colorado from 2011-12 to 2012-13 was 83.31%.

In Table 5 is the principal retention rate for all 22 possible school districts and yielded the possible participation of District 9 (less than average student demographic factors), School District 16 (average student demographic factors), and School District 15 (higher than average student demographic factors) for inclusion in the study. It is interesting to note that School District 9 was identified as a possible district for investigation in light of high teacher satisfaction and high principal retention rates.



Following the protocol I established, I would seek permission from the school district with the second highest principal retention rate within the demographic band if one of the three school districts declined participation in the study. The superintendent in School District 15 declined participation, stating that the school district leaders were not allowing any outside research to be conducted due to the implementation of a large, district-wide initiative. Following the selection protocol, I sought permission to conduct research in the school district with the second highest score for a school district with higher than average demographic factors and was granted permission to conduct research in School District 21.

Table 5

*2011-12 to 2012-13 Principal Retention Rates for 22 Colorado School Districts  
Organized Within Student Demographic Bands*

Districts with Less than Average Student Demographic Factors			Districts with Average Student Demographic Factors			Districts with Higher than Average Student Demographic Factors		
District	Demo- graphic Score	% Principal Retention	District	Demo- graphic Score	% Principal Retention	District	Demo- graphic Score	% Principal Retention
D13	52.12	78.85	D12	57.49	81.58	D19	138.08	60.00
D2	25.03	81.21	D22	65.53	83.87	D20	81.29	70.59
D14	35.12	82.50	D4	62.83	85.86	D5	117.51	83.33
D6	37.56	84.37	D8	57.83	87.65	D11	89.43	85.58
D1	50.62	86.58	D7	71.89	88.57	D18	116.29	85.71
D3	46.16	89.52	D17	58.06	90.00	D21	83.42	86.36
D9	44.23	90.28	D10	61.14	90.77	D15	134.83	87.10
			D16	60.68	92.86			

*Note.* Demographic Score = % of K-12 students receiving free or reduced lunch benefits + % of PK-12 students receiving special education services + % of PK-12 students who are identified as English language learners reported by CDE. Source for Principal Retention Percent is Principal Turnover Rates (CDE, 2012f).

### Individual Participants

Participants in the study were key informants who were likely to have special knowledge, perceptions, understandings, and experiences with the phenomenon (Gall,

Gall, & Borg, 2007). Since I researched the voices of both principals as well as those who hire and supervise principals at the school district level, key informants for this study included human resource directors, supervisors of principals, at least one recently appointed principal, and at least one veteran principal from each of the participating school districts. The rationale for the inclusion of each type of school district employee follows. Although succession cannot be solely a human resource endeavor (Rothwell, 2010), human resource leaders are probably knowledgeable about succession planning and leadership development efforts within their school district and will be, therefore, invited to participate in the study. Principal supervisors might have good insight into selection processes as well as the retention of quality principals. Also, since principals themselves are the recipients of whatever succession practices are present or absent within an organization, principals might provide valuable insight into the succession practices within the school district. Newly appointed principals might be able to speak to recruiting, selection, and induction practices while more veteran principals might be able to speak to retention practices. Consistent with qualitative research, I chose participants that helped me understand the essence and basic structure of the phenomenon of principal succession through the meaning that these participants ascribed to their experiences (Merriam, 2009). It was hoped these participants would be knowledgeable and interested in the topic, that this approach would produce rich and trustworthy data, and that the final product would help the reader better understand the phenomenon (Merriam, 2009).

Once Institutional Review Board (IRB) permission was granted through the university and the school districts were selected, I sought permission to conduct research in each of the five school districts and solicited the contact information of the human

resources director or other key contact person. I then asked this key contact person to nominate other school district personnel and principals as possible participants. For the recently appointed principal, I requested the name of at least one first-time principal who had participated in the school district's orientation activities and who had been asked to return for another year of service to take part in the study. For the veteran principal, I requested the name of at least one principal with more than four years in the same school since researchers suggest that school district leaders should try to assign principals to the same positions for four to seven years (Louis et al., 2010).

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

I secured IRB permission from the university, which can be found in Appendix A. Five Colorado school districts were selected for participation in this study: three school districts that had the highest TELL factor for their demographic band (less than average, average, or higher than average) and three school districts that had the highest principal retention rate for their demographic band (less than average, average, or higher than average). Information for all five school districts is displayed in Table 6. School District 9, from now on referred to as Colorfield had the highest TELL score and the highest principal retention rate for its demographic band (less than average), thus producing five participant school districts instead of six. I sent a letter of introduction, located in Appendix B, to the superintendent in each school district explaining the study, requesting permission to conduct the research, and soliciting the name of the key contact person. I also applied for and was granted permission through Colorfield School District's internal review process since it was the only school district with a formal internal approval process for conducting research.

Table 6

*Colorado School Districts for Study*

	School District	K-12 Pupil Count	Demographic Score	Site-based Licensed Educators	TELL % Participation	TELL Factor Score	% Principal Retention
State School District		833,186	66.12	60,892	54.52	78.17	83.31
D9	Colorfield	27,121	44.23	1,934	73.32	85.00	90.28
D16	Meadowview	8,883	60.68	623	56.02	76.87	92.86
D22	Forrestglen	5,076	65.53	353	41.64	82.27	83.87
D20	Ridgetop	5,895	81.29	405	65.68	81.67	70.59
D21	Riverbend	5,251	83.42	452	77.21	78.73	86.36

*Note.* Demographic Score = % of K-12 FRL students + % of PK-12 ESS students + % of PK-12 EL students where FRL = Free and Reduced Lunch Status, ESS = Students receiving special education services, and EL = students identified as English language learners. TELL Factor Score = Average of Q7.4, Q10.1, and Q10.6 from 2013 TELL Colorado Survey at url: <http://www.tellcolorado.org/results>. % Principal Retention = Retention of Principals from 2011-12 to 2012-13 as reported by CDE (2012f).

After securing permission in each of the five school districts, I talked to the key contact person in each school district to discuss the project, receive recommendations and contact information for possible participants for the study, and coordinate dates of site visits. Depending on the preference of the key contact in each school district, either I or the main contact person in each school district made arrangements for the individual interviews through email or by phone, informed potential participants of the purpose of the study, and offered them the opportunity to participate. I explained that participation was voluntary and secured dates, times, and locations for the interviews. Although I gave participants a choice of where to meet for the interview, all of the interviews for school district administrators occurred in the administrator's office at the school district administration building. With the exception of one participant's (Elm) interview in Forrestglen which occurred following a presentation that he gave to the school board, all of the principal interviews occurred at the school where the participant was principal. In November and December of 2014, I traveled to each of the five Colorado school districts

and spent one to two days in each school district. Prior to arrival, I worked with the key contact in each school district to set up dates and times for the interviews and arrange any observations, document reviews, or other activities.

As is consistent with qualitative approaches, I employed a semi-structured interview format with a few open-ended questions as to not restrict the responses of the participants, and to allow the participants to respond in detail from their perspective (Creswell, 2008). This approach yielded information that helped me answer each research question. I prepared an interview guide which assisted me attend to matters of informed consent and confidentiality, build rapport before beginning the interview, explain the risks and benefits of participation, and thank the participants for their participation (Gall et al., 2007). The interview guide also guided the flow of the interview questions and was used as a note-taking device. Each interview was scheduled for at least an hour to ensure adequate time to ask the questions and any follow-up probes. During the interviews, I recorded the responses using a digital recording device as well as took notes for later review during the data analysis. The concepts to be explored included: succession activities that address a school district's need to create and maintain a pool of qualified and willing principal candidates; recruiting and hiring practices employed by the school district leaders; programs and supports that help new and experienced principals transition into their new roles and continue to develop as leaders; and policies and practices that aid in the retention of well-qualified principals. The interview guides and questions are located in Appendix C for school district administrators and in Appendix D for principals. Each interview was transcribed as soon after the interview as possible by myself or a professional transcriptionist. I personally

transcribed five of the 18 interview transcripts to begin the coding process and answering the research questions. I employed a professional transcriptionist to transcribe remainder of the interviews. For these interviews, I listened to the recordings to check the accuracy of the transcription and made any corrections prior to coding the transcript as part of the data analysis.

It was anticipated that school district personnel might have documents that support and guide their succession practices. I examined the websites of the participating school districts for artifacts related to succession practices. As other documents surfaced during the interviews, I asked for a copy of these documents. I analyzed the documents that I received and used information from the documents to support and verify participant responses.

As a researcher, I was fortunate to be able to participate in observations of other school district activities that gave me more information regarding the school district context and the participants. In Riverbend School District, I observed an administrator induction session. I was also invited to participate in a half-day session of instructional rounds with the school district's high school principals, assistant principals, and the Assistant Superintendent (Eddy) in which we reviewed a classroom observation tool, conducted walkthrough observations of several high school classrooms, debriefed the observations, and considered trends in the instruction. In Forrestglen School District, I was able to observe five of the school district's principals give a presentation on their school's goals, progress, and action steps to members of the local school board, the superintendent, and several other administrators. In Forrestglen, I also attended a community meeting where school district stakeholders including community members,

teachers, local law enforcement agents, and parents shared what they perceived as the strengths of the school district and hopes for the future. This meeting was conducted by an outside educational consultant and attended by the superintendent and the school board representative for that area. In Meadowview School District, I received a tour of the entire school district and was able to conduct a follow up interview with the Director of Human Resources after interviewing the principal participants. Additionally, I received a school tour including brief classroom visits in six of the 11 principal participants' schools school led by the principal.

Each of the school districts and participants were assigned pseudonyms to help protect the confidentiality of the participants. Participant pseudonyms were assigned that help connect the individual participants to their school district. The assigned pseudonyms for participants from Colorfield School District were Pewter, White, Green and Turquoise; the participants from Forrestglen School District were Maple, Oak, Pine and Elm; the participants from Meadowview School District were Sage, Columbine, and Sedge; the participants from Ridgetop School District were Peak, Summit and Boulder; and the participants from Riverbend School District were Eddy, Stream, Brook, and Banks as shown in Table 7. Because each school district used slightly different titles for the administrator who hires and/or supervises principals, some of the participant's titles were slightly changed to either Director of Human Resources or Assistant Superintendent to further protect the confidentiality of school district leaders. Throughout this analysis the participants are identified with their pseudonym and an abbreviation of their position in the school district as it may help the reader interpret the participant's comments. Eighteen participants were interviewed including seven school district administrators and

11 school principals. The six veteran principals had at least 10 years of experience each as principal in their current school. The five newer school administrators were in their first to fourth year in their position.

Table 7

*Individual Participants' Position, Role in the Study, and Years of Experience*

School district	Participant position and abbreviation	Participant role in study	Participant name	Years in position	Years in school district
Colorfield	Assistant Superintendent (AS)	Hires and supervises elementary principals	Pewter	2	5
	Elementary Principal (EP)	Veteran principal	White	10	12+
	Middle School Principal (MP)	Veteran principal	Green	22	40
	High School Asst. Principal (HAP)	New (assistant) principal	Turquoise	1	13+
Forrestglen	Superintendent (S)	Hires and supervises principals	Maple	3	25
	Assistant Superintendent (AS)	Conducts hiring and induction process	Oak	3	15
	Elementary Principal (EP)	Veteran principal	Pine	12	12
	High School Principal (HP)	New principal	Elm	1	10
Meadowview	Director of Human Resources (HRD)	Manages hiring process and supports principals	Sage	4	22
	Elementary Principal (EP)	Veteran principal	Columbine	10	23
	Middle Principal (MP)	Newer principal	Sedge	4	16
Ridgetop	Assistant Superintendent (AS)	Manages hiring process and provides coaching for administrators	Peak	4	13
	Elementary Principal (EP)	New principal	Summit	3	3
	Middle School Principal (MP)	Veteran principal	Boulder	12	17
Riverbend	Assistant Superintendent (AS)	Provides professional development, hires and supervises secondary principals	Eddy	2	2
	Director of Human Resources (HRD)	Manages hiring process	Stream	9	9
	Elementary Principal (EP)	New principal	Brook	2	2
	High School Principal (HP)	Veteran principal	Banks	10	13



## **Coding and Theme Development**

This approach yielded large amounts of textual evidence in the form of interview transcriptions, documents, and other researcher notes which I archived on my home computer and/or in my home office. However, thorough textual renderings of the materials is recommended to provide views of feelings, thoughts, and actions as well as context and structure of the settings and participants (Charmaz, 2001). I coded the data throughout the data collection using open coding, followed by axial coding. “A code is a researcher-generated construct that symbolizes and attributes interpreted meaning to each individual datum for later purposes of pattern detection, categorization, theory building, and other analytic processes” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 4). Saldaña (2013) offered several clarifications regarding codes and coding that proved useful to me as a qualitative researcher: codes serves as a critical link between data collection and the explanation of meaning; some codes can be predetermined to align with the study’s conceptual framework, paradigm, or research goals while others may emerge from the data; coding is a method of discovery that stimulates thinking about the data that has been collected; coding is the transitional process between data collection and more extensive data analysis; and the coding method will depend on the research questions and the answers that the researcher seeks.

Open coding occurred when I first began to review the data. I was open to any possible themes or categories and noted any data that might be useful in answering my research questions or that had potential to be relevant, interesting, or important to the study (Merriam, 2009). Axial coding followed the open coding in which I grouped and combined the open codes. Some codes were subdivided and some subsumed under other

codes and categories as I coded the individual data sets and began the constant comparative process (Merriam, 2009). I compared the codes from the first data set to the second and the codes from the second data set to the first. I made a master list of concepts derived from both sets of data and continued this process with each data set as these patterns and regularities became the categories or themes into which subsequent items were sorted (Merriam, 2009).

I began with individual cases and developed progressively more abstract conceptual categories to synthesize, explain, and identify relationships in the data (Charmaz, 2001). To begin coding the data, I started with the transcript from one interview. I read the transcript and familiarized myself with the words and perceptions of the participant. Saldaña (2013) explained that initial coding or open coding can range from the descriptive to the conceptual to the theoretical, depending on what the researcher observes in and infers from the data, and depending on the researcher's knowledge and experiences. I formed initial codes by segmenting the information (Creswell, 2015) and writing words, short phrases, or statements to summarize the participants' words, concepts, or ideas in the margin. I transferred these codes into a separate document for each participant. I examined these codes and highlighted related ideas which became categories. The initial categories were stakeholder involvement, relationships, the principal job, differentiation, and structures and practices related to the difference phases of the principal succession cycle. Although these categories changed and expanded through the analysis, these initial categories were important to understanding the data and beginning the analysis. This process also facilitated the

location of participants' words to use when writing memos, descriptions of practices, and drafts of the findings.

The constant comparative process was important as I strove to understand the essence of the phenomenon and discover what was relevant within the worlds that were studied from the participants' views (Merriam, 2009). I performed a similar process on the second transcript by coding segments in the margins, examining these codes and highlighting related ideas related to the initial five categories from the first transcript. Using the constant comparative method, I kept coding the interviews using the initial and other categories based on the data. I coded all the participant interviews from one school district before analyzing the next set of interviews. This process helped me analyze the data, construct the descriptions of practices for each of the five school districts, and compose the individual profiles. At times I noticed evidence of another category in the transcript of one participant but often these categories did not bear out across several interviews. A few of these categories were: the importance of helping other people grow, being a change agent, and forward thinking which were incorporated into the profile for that individual participant.

In addition, I used memo-making/writing, as recommended by Charmaz (2001), as an important intermediate step between coding the data and writing drafts of the findings to help me elaborate processes, assumptions, and actions that were subsumed under the codes. Memo-writing consists of breaking categories into their components, allows the researcher to get his/her ideas down without worrying about grammar or audience, and can aid in the constant comparative methods (Charmaz, 2001). I wrote short drafts related to each theme and created charts, tables, or mindmaps of the ideas and

themes, always trying to make sense of the compilation of data, rather than focusing on one individual or school district.

I had over 10 pages of transcripts for each of the 18 participants and needed a way to organize the data beyond the large categories. Rather than be constrained by strict procedures and preset categories that can be associated with axial coding, I focused on connecting and organizing categories that emerged from the data using constant comparative analysis (Creswell, 2015). Since, some of the interview questions asked about specific phases of the principal succession cycle, I transformed my working notes into charts about induction, hiring, connections with preparation programs, and principal trainings and meetings with notes about the practices in each of the five school districts. I used these charts to help me compare and contrast the practices and look for additional themes. I added a chart about transition practices. These working notes guided my thinking and helped me write about the succession practices for each school district. The working notes for succession practices in school districts with high TELL results are contained in Appendix E and the working notes of succession practices in school districts with high principal retention rates are contained in Appendix F.

Theme development was an outcome of decoding, categorization, and analytic reflection (Saldaña, 2013). As I kept coding the transcripts and reflecting on the data, I realized that the participants had identified a set of challenges related to current issues of principal succession. I identified the following categories in the challenges: need for quality applicants, growing leaders, do-ability of the principal job, lack of rewards, traditional interview not being sufficient to select a principal, and principals' need for

support. These challenges were later combined into two themes: the challenge of well-qualified candidates and challenge of do-ability.

When analyzing the data further, I discovered that leaders in the participant school districts either leveraged current succession practices or added practices which contributed to principal retention. In regard to retention, I identified the following themes: collaborative culture, stakeholder involvement, internal support, developing leaders, differentiated support, providing meaningful work, valuing principals, the community, and salary.

I reread and reviewed all 18 transcripts looking for participants' words to support each of the categories or themes. Since moving the data electronically by cutting and pasting proved to be too unwieldy, when I found quotations that supported an idea, I cut the quote and placed it in an envelope labeled with the title of the theme. Upon further analysis, the theme "internal support" became "relationship with supervisors and other district office administrators" with four subthemes: accessibility, visibility, need for safety, and using evaluation for growth. Some adjustments to the themes were made by combining, deleting, or dividing themes throughout the drafting of the findings, always in an attempt to organize the data in ways that honored the words and actions of the participants and in ways that would help a reader make sense of the data. The final themes are demonstrated in Table 8.

### **Trustworthiness**

In order to generate trustworthy and authentic research consistent with a constructivism paradigm (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011), I built in strategies consistent with qualitative methodology during the design, data collection, data analysis,

and reporting phases of my project to increase the validity of the study, the credibility of the results, the quality, and the rigor of the research (Gall et al., 2007). Often, in qualitative research, "terms like credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability replace the usual positivist criteria of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 13), however, the question of authenticity framed by the concepts of validity, reliability, and triangulation are no less important (Bush, 2007).

Patton (2002) described triangulation as process in which the researcher checks findings against other sources and perspectives so that the study's findings cannot be discounted due to a single method, source, or researcher's bias. He discussed four kinds of triangulation that can contribute to the verification and validation of qualitative analysis: methods triangulation, triangulation of sources, analyst triangulation, and perspective triangulation. In this study, I triangulated sources by comparing different types of data gained through interviews, documents, and observations, as well as comparing perspectives from different stakeholders and in different school district cases using constant comparative procedures. Since multiple analysts were not available in this study, I had participants review the findings for accuracy, completeness, fairness, and perceived validity as an approach to analytical triangulation (Patton, 2002). As was possible, I used this type of member checking to allow participants to review statements, descriptions, and emergent themes. I also arranged for peer examination where other researchers review the findings to determine if the findings are grounded in the data, the inferences are logical, and the themes are appropriate (Creswell, 2007).

Table 8

*Final Themes Related to Each Research Question*

Q1 (Practices for School Districts with High Colorado TELL Survey Results)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Succession Practices-stakeholder input in hiring, principal meetings focused on learning, and individualized transition plan</li> <li>• Positive Relationship Between Building Principals and Teachers-teacher input valued, teachers are trusted, principals are caring and supportive, and principals are followed</li> </ul>
Q2 (Practices for School Districts with High Principal Retention Rates)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Succession Practices-similar to High TELL School Districts</li> <li>• Differentiated and Individualized Support</li> <li>• Stakeholder Input</li> <li>• Unique Characteristics</li> </ul>
Q3 (Practices that Influence Retention)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenge of Developing a Well-Qualified Applicant Pool <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Growth and Development of Assistant Principals</li> <li>○ Identifying and Tapping Future Leaders</li> <li>○ Partnerships with Preparation Programs</li> <li>○ Teacher Leader Opportunities</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The Do-ability Challenge <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Retention Factor: Meaningful and Engaging Work</li> <li>○ Retention Factor: More Support for New Principals</li> <li>○ Retention Factor: Salary</li> <li>○ Retention Factor: Collaborative Culture</li> <li>○ Retention Factor: Supportive Relationships with Supervisors and School District Administrators (accessibility, visibility, support and safety, evaluation process that supports growth)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The Role of the Community in Principal Retention</li> </ul>

One key to trustworthiness within qualitative research is to collect sufficient data as to create and test plausible interpretations of what is found (Bassey, 2007). Through the iterative nature of this project and its focus on multiple cases and participants, I collected ample data to depict the essence or the basic structure of principal succession practices in these Colorado school districts. Strauss and Corbin (1990) stressed theoretical saturation that they described as the point when no new data relevant to the

coding categories or new categories emerge and the relationships between the categories seem well established and validated. Furthermore, I used recordings and notes of interviews and any observations that were detailed enough to provide a “full and revealing picture of what is going on” (Gall et al., 2007, p. 475). I took researcher notes and journaled after interactions with participants and settings to continually be aware of my assumptions and positions regarding the phenomenon being studied. These processes developed an audit trail, which may help other researchers validate or challenge findings, as well as construct other arguments (Bassey, 2007).

Applicability is a term used in qualitative research instead of generalizability. The reader or user of the research has the responsibility to determine applicability of the findings to their own situations (Gall et al., 2007). I have attempted to help users of this study determine if the findings are applicable their setting by providing thick descriptions of the contexts, settings, activities, and participants (Gall et al, 2007) and by using direct quotes in the findings and participants’ words in the findings and in the naming of codes (Charmaz, 2001). I anticipated that through the design of this project, I could bring the readers close to the subjects’ world and enlighten the readers by providing useful and meaningful results (Gall et al., 2007). I have made it clear that any conclusions are suggestive, plausible, and helpful ways of seeing things, but do not represent any “one true way” (Crotty, 2003, p. 13).

Finally, a qualitative report must include information about the researcher’s experience, training, perspective, and personal connections with the intent to “report any personal and professional information that may have affected data collection, analysis, and interpretation—either negatively or positively—in the minds of the users of the



findings” (Patton, 2002, p. 566). I have included a section in this chapter that discusses my experiences with principal succession. I believe that by using the strategies described here, I was able to conduct this research and report the findings in ways that are authentic and trustworthy.

### **Limitations and Subjectivities**

There are several limitations to this study. As mentioned earlier, I developed this sampling procedure for selecting school districts based on a review of the literature in hopes of including information-rich cases. Based on the findings, I believe that the sampling procedure did provide information-rich cases but since the sample is limited, it is hard to determine if other sampling procedures would have yielded similar results. Findings from qualitative studies are not meant to be generalizable but rather illustrative of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). The sample size was limited to five Colorado school districts with three or four participants per school district given time and resource constraints. I was able to identify common themes across the participant school districts to answer the first and second research questions and across all five school districts which seem to influence principal retention to answer the third research question.

In qualitative research, there is an awareness that the subjectivities of the researcher have a bearing on design of the study, the collection and interpretation of the data, and the conclusions. Although qualitative researchers may use protocols to collect data, the researcher is also an instrument for the collection of data (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002) and that the researcher cannot be separated from the research since the researcher is interpreting what they see, hear, and understand (Creswell, 2007). In recognition of this, my personal experiences and viewpoints regarding the principal selection, transition, and retention are explained in the following paragraphs.

Having spent over twenty-five years as a public school teacher, school district administrator, and school principal, I believe that school personnel are important in the improvement of schools and student achievement. I feel strongly that the selection of a principal within a school district or for a particular school is an important decision that sometimes is not given the due diligence it deserves. Sometimes the politics of a situation, the whims of school district personnel, the desire to keep or change the status quo, or rushed timing lead to the selection of a principal that is less than ideal. I have seen some newly appointed principals quickly establish themselves as the new leader and others fail miserably. I have observed the arrival of new principals disrupt positive school cultures and improvements or launch a school into a time of prosperity. I have witnessed successful principals with strong skills enter a new environment and fail miserably. With this said, I believe that thoughtful and purposeful planning of succession practices can increase the chances that a principal will succeed for the betterment of the school. I also believe that all leaders within an organization have a responsibility to help develop future leaders for the benefit of students. These future leaders can facilitate school improvement and sustain these improvements. I chose to conduct this research because I have a deep desire to see schools and students be successful which cannot happen in the absence of quality leaders. I believe that understanding and enhancing succession practices is an avenue for sustained improvements that helps students and schools be successful.

Crotty (2003) emphasized the need to recognize that we create meaning, not simply as individuals, but, as part of society in which historical and social factors play into our interpretations. Our culture influences which things we focus on, what possible

meanings they may have, and what things we will ignore. I was persistently aware of how my experiences, my assumptions, and my biases might be affecting the study as I approached the study, entered different research sites, collected data, and analyzed the results. Although a researcher cannot be separated from the research, I believe that the thoughtful and deliberate decisions I made in the purposeful sampling techniques based on a review of the literature and the methodology described in this chapter helped me interpret the phenomenon through the words of the participants and their views, rather than be held hostage to my preconceived ideas. Prior beliefs were temporarily bracketed or put aside while I gathered and interpreted data (Merriam, 2009). Following and documenting recommended procedures for data analysis helped get my researcher's biases out of the way (Patton, 2002) and systematic coding helped me take an analytical stance toward the data and refrain from inserting my own motives, fears, and personal issues into the analysis (Charmaz, 2001). Finally, a careful analysis of the data helped me break through assumptions and create new insights and novel theoretical formulations regarding the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). It was my goal to use sound design principles and my awareness of myself as the researcher in concert with each other to create trustworthy findings and conclusions.

### **Ethical Issues**

This study followed the guidelines and procedures outlined by the IRB at the University of Northern Colorado which reviews all research to ensure it meets ethical standards for research involving human subjects. All appropriate forms were submitted via IRBNet. I gained permission to conduct the study was obtained from the university and requested permission to conduct research within each of the selected school districts.

I also gained consent from each individual participant. As part of the interview protocol, I explained the nature and methodology of the project and reviewed the potential benefits and risks of participation. One potential benefit of participation was a greater understanding of the practices and policies that the school and school district leaders employ to influence principal retention. Another potential benefit was the opportunity to learn about the succession and retention practices in other school districts by reading a copy of the final report that was provided to each participating school district. Participants received a \$15 gift card to a local coffee shop for participation also. There were very few anticipated risks for participation. Individual data gathered within a school district was not shared with the supervisors or evaluators of the participants and both the school districts and individual participants were given pseudonyms. For the final report, personal identifiers such as names were not used and some titles were slightly changed to further protect confidentiality. The informed consent form explained the nature and methodology of the study and each participant's signature indicated his/her willingness to participate in the study. All participation was voluntary and participants were told that they could withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions.

I took customary precautions to protect the data. The digital recordings, transcripts, and any notes were stored at the researcher's home or on her personal home computer which is password protected. All personal data from the interviews was treated as confidential and was only available to the researcher.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this research project was to illuminate the nature, characteristics, and practices of principal succession in select Colorado school districts. This research

supported the needs of educational leaders to understand succession practices since principal succession can be disruptive to schools, principal workforce trends are troubling, and principals are instrumental to the success of school improvement efforts and student achievement. I conducted interviews with 11 principals and seven district-based leaders in five Colorado school districts thought to be information-rich cases. The five school districts were selected as cases based on the purposeful sampling described earlier in this chapter. Subsequently, I garnered responses to critical questions regarding principal succession practices and policies in these school districts using the data from interview transcripts, document reviews, and observer notes. Then, using specific procedures for the data analysis, I produced a composite description for each school district that might help practitioners and policymakers better understand principal succession. I also analyzed the data for themes to illuminate the practices of these school district leaders that contribute to the retention of principals.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

In this qualitative study, the policies and practices regarding principal succession in five Colorado school districts with more positive working conditions as reported by the Colorado Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning (TELL) Survey and/or higher principal retention rates were explored to further understand the extent to which school district leaders are using succession practices to meet their leadership needs. I conducted interviews with several key informants in each school district. These participants were thought to be knowledgeable about the principal succession practices in the school district. Participants were newer and veteran principals, as well as school district administrators that hire and support principals. This study illuminated principal succession practices that these school districts use and provided useful insights to other school district leaders, policy makers, and others regarding the retention of high quality principals.

#### **Organization of the Chapter**

In this chapter, I discuss the findings from the interviews, document review, and observations that I conducted with the 18 participants from five Colorado school districts chosen for participation due to their high TELL Colorado Survey results and/or higher principal retention rates. I present the participant profiles and a description of the succession activities for each school district in relation to the research questions:

- Q1     What are the principal succession practices of large school districts with high teacher satisfaction as reported on the TELL Colorado Survey when controlling for student demographics?
- Q2     What are the principal succession practices of large school districts with high principal retention rates when controlling for student demographics?
- Q3     What are the policies and practices that school district employees believe influence the retention of principals?

First, I describe the findings and analyses from the three selected school districts with high TELL Colorado Survey results. Next, I discuss the findings and analyses from the selected school districts with high principal retention rates. Finally, I consider the policies and practices that school district employees believe influence the retention of principals. Since principal succession can be viewed as a cycle (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011), I will describe each school district's practices in the following order: selection, onboarding and induction, ongoing professional development and support, and preparation of future leaders. Following the descriptions of the participants and practices, I will discuss themes that emerged from the analysis of the data.

As discussed in Chapter III, each of the school districts and participants were assigned pseudonyms to help protect the confidentiality of the participants. Participant pseudonyms were assigned that help connect the individual participants to their school district. The assigned pseudonyms for participants from Colorfield School District were Pewter, White, Green and Turquoise; the participants from Forrestglen School District were Maple, Oak, Pine and Elm; the participants from Meadowview School District were Sage, Columbine, and Sedge; the participants from Ridgetop School District were Peak, Summit and Boulder; and the participants from Riverbend School District were Eddy, Stream, Brook, and Banks. Because each school district used slightly different titles for

the administrator who hires and/or supervises principals, some of the participants' titles were slightly changed to either Director of Human Resources or Assistant Superintendent to further protect the confidentiality of school district leaders. Throughout this analysis, the participants were identified with their pseudonym and an abbreviation of their position in the school district as it may help the reader interpret the participant's comments. Eighteen participants were interviewed, including seven school district administrators and 11 school principals. The six veteran principals had at least 10 years of experience each as principal in their current school. The five newer school administrators were in their first to fourth year in their position.

**Succession Practices of School Districts with High  
Colorado Teaching, Empowering, Leading,  
and Learning Survey Results: Answer  
to Research Question #1**

Teacher satisfaction has been linked to satisfaction with school leadership (Boyd et al., 2011). The TELL Colorado Survey was administered to Colorado educators in 2009, 2011, and 2013 (New Teacher Center [NTC], 2013d) and results from the 2013 administration were used as part of the selection criteria for school districts in this study on principal succession practices. As outlined in Chapter III, I used a demographic weighting formula and results from certain questions from the TELL Colorado Survey that most aligned with issues of principal succession to select school districts for possible inclusion in this study. The calculations resulted in the identification of Colorfield School District (less than average student demographic factors), Forrestglen School District (average student demographic factors), and Ridgetop School District (higher than average student demographic factors) for inclusion in the study due to their high TELL Colorado Survey results within their respective demographic bands. A summary of the



school districts, participant position, role as it relates to this study on principal succession practices, participant name, years in their current administrative position, and years in their current school district is provided in Table 9.

Table 9

*Individual Participants' Position, Role in the Study, and Years of Experience from School Districts with High Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning Survey Results*

School district	Participant position and abbreviation	Participant role in study	Participant name	Years in position	Years in school district
Colorfield	Assistant Superintendent (AS)	Hires and supervises elementary principals	Pewter	2	5
	Elementary Principal (EP)	Veteran principal	White	10	12+
	Middle School Principal (MP)	Veteran principal	Green	22	40
	High School Asst. Principal (HAP)	New (assistant) principal	Turquoise	1	13+
Forrestglen	Superintendent (S)	Hires and supervises principals	Maple	3	25
	Assistant Superintendent (AS)	Conducts hiring and induction process	Oak	3	15
	Elementary Principal (EP)	Veteran principal	Pine	12	12
	High School Principal (HP)	New principal	Elm	1	10
Ridgetop	Assistant Superintendent (AS)	Manages hiring process and provides coaching for administrators	Peak	4	13
	Elementary Principal (EP)	New principal	Summit	3	3
	Middle School Principal (MP)	Veteran principal	Boulder	12	17

In this section, I report the findings for the first research question: What are the principal succession practices of large school districts with high teacher satisfaction as reported on the TELL Colorado Survey when controlling for student demographics? I provide a profile of the individual participants from each school district and a description of the principal succession practices that each of these three school districts use for selecting, developing, and retaining school principals. Then I discuss common themes

that emerged when analyzing responses from participants in these school districts. These themes include:

- Teachers' input is valued and acted upon
- Teachers are trusted and treated as professionals
- Principals genuinely care about staff and students
- Principals are leaders that teachers follow

My working notes regarding the succession practices of these three school districts in a table format are found in Appendix E and may help the reader compare and contrast the practices within each district.

### **Colorfield School District Profile**

Colorfield School District, located in a community near the mountains with some of its schools in the foothills, serves about 27,000 students in a fairly affluent community. Less than 30% of the students come from poverty as measured by Free and Reduced Lunch status and less than 7% are English language learners. There are nearly 50 schools that serve the diverse smaller towns as well as a large city where the majority of the schools and the school district offices are located. The city boasts a well-known and popular university and has a reputation for being a very safe community. Colorfield School District was the only school district that was selected for participation in this study under both categories. Colorfield had the highest TELL Colorado Survey results and the highest principal retention rate among the eligible school districts with less than average student demographic factors.

**Colorfield School District participant profiles.** Pewter is the assistant superintendent (AS) for elementary schools. There is another assistant superintendent in

Colorfield who is Pewter's counterpart and supervises the secondary principals. Pewter, like many of the administrators in the school district, came to Colorfield with several years of administrative experience under his belt. The majority of his educational experience was in another state where he served as a teacher, principal, and school district administrator. Pewter reported that he learned many of his ideas for hiring and supporting principals from the superintendent in that former school district. Pewter's main role is to support and supervise the nearly 30 elementary principals. He takes his job of supporting the principals seriously stating, "I think the most important job in the [education] business is a teacher, followed closely by a principal." Pewter also mentioned that he has served as the induction mentor for two new assistant principals which he valued, saying, "It was really good to get my blades sharp again, and really start thinking like a building [principal] as opposed to the biggest, biggest picture."

White is a busy and experienced elementary principal (EP) in Colorfield. Pewter (AS) described White as a great leader with poise and composure who understands the value of working with stakeholders. Pewter (AS) stated, "White really understands how to make the whole system work. He knows when to give and take. He knows when to push and pull, knows when to back off. He's got that timing thing. Insightful guy." White is now in his tenth year as principal at the school where he joined the Colorfield School District as a teacher. He had several years of teaching experience in other states before moving to Colorado and the Colorfield School District. White said he felt fortunate to be part of a short-lived principal intern program in Colorfield where he served as an intern for two quarters for two experienced principals:

I don't know if they intended it to be this way, but the two [principals] with whom I was paired were dramatically different, both effective, both really good and both

great results but just very, very different in the way they approached the job. So that was neat to see to very different, effective, but very different styles.

White believed that this experience prepared him for the role of principal and he has continued to rely on those two principals to serve as mentors and supports. White stated that he was unsure of why the intern program went away but conjectured that it “most likely that had to do with either budget funding and/or a change in leadership.” This year is the first school year that White has had administrative support in the form of a half-time assistant principal who teaches the other half of each day. He expressed that the additional support was helpful, especially when it came to providing feedback to the teachers on their instruction to the degree required by the current teacher evaluation system.

Green has been in the Colorfield School District for her entire life, 13 years as a student, and 40 years as a teacher, assistant principal, and principal. Green is an experienced middle level educator who has spent the majority of her career in the middle school where she has been serving as the principal (MP) for the last 22 years. She has dedicated her life to her job and she makes no apologies for that, “I don’t have a spouse or kids or grandkids, so I’ve devoted tons of time and willingly, happily, to school and to kids and staff and what needs to be done. So I’m a workaholic, I readily admit it.” This is Green’s last year as principal since she will top out of the state retirement system after 40 years of service. Green has seen lots of changes in the principalship through her years but claimed that she has loved the work:

In fact, I’m sad, not excited about leaving, because I’m still really into this [school district] and I feel like I’ve invested in this [school district] and I have a lot to give. And I know I’m the odd duck, because most people are not wanting to stay this long in the profession and it is hard and it’s gotten harder.

Although a few of the Colorfield School District principals have been appointed to their positions within the last few years, these principals were not new to the principalship or had not participated in induction and orientation recently therefore a new assistant principal was recommended as a participant for this study. Turquoise, a high school assistant principal (HAP) who is completing induction this year, is one of four assistant principals at a large high school where she also serves as the administrator for the school's International Baccalaureate program. She is currently working as an assistant principal in a building where she was a teacher on special assignment supporting new teachers for 10 years in addition to serving as a classroom teacher. She asserted that she is a person that seeks new challenges and was one of the first people to step up and be part of a pilot program to add assistant principals to the elementary schools a few years ago. She said that when she moved into an administrative position at the elementary level "the learning curve was huge." Turquoise returned to the high school classroom for one year and then interviewed for and received her current assistant principal position. She is a parent with young children and is striving for balance in her life. When talking about retention, she stated that she is not sure if putting 60 to 80 hours of work in each week is a reasonable demand for administrators: "I'm not sure that expectation is one that is sustainable or would keep me in this job."

**Colorfield School District succession practices.** Colorfield School District is fortunate to garner large pools of applicants for principal and teacher positions. White (EP), mentioned that, although the candidate pools for principal positions have diminished from 60 or 70 to 20 or 30, there are still quite a few quality candidates. The assistant superintendent, Pewter remarked, "Our people come here and stay. Our

principals don't leave." In fact, Pewter could only recall one instance in the last five years where a principal took a position in another school district. All other principal departures had been retirements or instances where principals had accepted another position within the school district.

The selection process involves three interviews with a site-based committee, a district-based committee, and a final interview with the assistant superintendent and the superintendent. In the last few years, the process has become a little more driven by the school district administrators in that school district administrators now screen and send a few candidates to the site-based committee to interview rather than have the site-based team sort through all the applicants and send the names of finalists to the school district administrators. Stakeholder involvement is an important aspect of the principal hiring process in the Colorfield School District. Pewter (AS) explained that he uses a process of asking three or four key questions and getting staff feedback before building the principal candidate profile. Then he chooses eight to 10 candidates that are interviewed by an internal team of school district principal and administrator colleagues. The top three finalists interview with a site-based teacher and parent committee and, later, with himself and the superintendent. After considering input from the various stakeholders, Pewter makes the final decision in consultation with the superintendent.

Colorfield administrators prefer to fill their positions by mid-April so that the new principals and their former school district leaders have plenty of time to adjust and for the transition. Once principals are hired, Pewter (AS) begins to include them in emails and other communication. He also reaches out to them on a weekly basis to check-in and support them in the transition and throughout their first one to two years. Prior to school

staff returning in the fall, the school district personnel offer an orientation regarding Colorfield policies, practices, and personnel for new administrators.

Administrator induction in Colorfield includes the assignment of a mentor, a few days of orientation, and a notebook for recording activities related to the Colorado Principal Standards. The school district also employs a mentor coordinator who works with both administrator and teacher induction. Turquoise (HAP) shared her induction notebook in which she recorded activities with her mentor, trainings that she has attended, and activities related to each principal standard. For Turquoise, the mentor has been the most valuable part of induction. Turquoise reported that that she and her mentor who is a former principal meet at least once a month and that she sends him emails regularly.

According to Pewter (AS), the induction process looks a little different for the 23 half-time assistant principals that were added to the elementary schools this year. White (EP) explained that each principal serves as the mentor for their assistant principal on “a day to day basis” and that there is a more formal program and group mentor that was arranged by Pewter. The group mentor is a recently retired Colorfield School District principal and member of the superintendent’s cabinet about whom Pewter commented, “She has done anything you can imagine in the business. She has seen it, done it, 40 years in the business. She’s 63, 62 years old, still got it. She’s sharp, knows what is going on. She is only 5 months removed from the district.” This group mentor has used the principal evaluation rubric to gather information about the new assistant principals’ needs and then Pewter has fashioned learning sessions based on their collective needs.

In Colorfield, monthly principal meetings are moving away from strictly business or informational meetings toward meetings with more professional development. In recent years, the school district leaders have developed and disseminated a new instructional framework and developed their own evaluation tool for teachers and principals. Much of the professional development for principals revolves around instructional practices. While there are several professional development courses offered within the school district, there is not a set of courses that all administrators must take.

Although the school district leaders have benefitted from the university being in the same town, none of the participants mentioned any leadership preparation cohorts or ongoing, structured activities to identify and train potential future principals. When asked about leadership preparation programs, Pewter (AS) responded, “Over the last five to seven years, we have offered various leadership growth opportunities but I would not say it is formalized.” White (EP) lamented that the intern program in which he had participated no longer existed and Green (MP) said that there was not a formal pipeline. Turquoise (HAP) hoped for more programs:

Boy, I wish there were more. Honestly, part of the reason I applied for the elementary [pilot program] was, I had been saying, and I said this to last assistant superintendent, that they really needed to work on growing from within....And I think that's one of the very first times in a long time that we had a program like that where leadership opportunities were encouraged from within. Truly.

Lastly, in Colorfield, the assistant principalship is not revered as an entry into a principalship. Pewter explained:

When I met with them [the assistant principals] about their mentoring, I was very careful to explain to them this is not an ascension to the principalship in this district. This is an opportunity to cultivate your talents and if you aspire to do any number of things, beyond the assistant principalship we hope to put you in a better position to do so. But you're not earning a principalship in this district. It



depends on the job. It depends on your skill set. It depends on your competition outside the district.

In the Colorfield community, there are high expectations for principals and Pewter wants to hire the best. He concluded:

If they're [an internal and external candidate] tied, I'd take the internal candidate. If I have two people and I can't decide because they're both so great, I'll take our family. Any day. But if they're not equal I'm not giving them a hometown pass. We're talking about our *kids* [emphasis added]. They're not pounding widgets, you know?

Although Colorfield is the largest school district in this study, the principal succession practices are focused on meeting the needs of students and maintaining the high standards for teaching and learning in every school across the district.

### **Forrestglen School District Profile**

Forrestglen School District is a rural school district comprised of 16 schools within four distinct communities. The area is known for its hunting, fishing, and agricultural products. Each community has a feeder system with at least one elementary, middle, and high school. The school district office is located on a country road between two of the communities. Forrestglen had high teacher satisfaction in regard to school leadership as reported on the TELL Colorado Survey for school districts with average student demographic factors.

**Forrestglen School District participant profiles.** Maple, the current superintendent (S), is a warm, friendly woman with a no-nonsense attitude. She has spent 25 of her 29 years in education in Forrestglen where she taught business classes for 15 years. She has worked as a financial director for a technical college, as an assistant principal, and as the assistant superintendent for human resources. She served one year as the interim superintendent before being offered a three-year contract as superintendent.

This is her fourth year as superintendent. While she worked in the human resource department, Maple realized, “It’s the people and the staff that create your school district. And relationships are number one, with kids, with staff, with anyone. You have to have the relationships. And if you have [relationships], people will go the extra mile for you.” Maple grew up on a dairy farm and learned about work ethic and hard work. She offers clear and high expectations for her principals coupled with support. If things are not going well, she said, “We just call them [the principals] on it...and set up a plan to fix it. They need to know that you mean business too. You say it with a smile but say, ‘Hey, this is what is going to happen.’” Maple loves her job and says that she “wouldn’t trade it for the world” stating that “I just hope I make a positive difference for the students and staff of this school district.”

Oak, the assistant superintendent for personnel (AS), is in his twenty-eighth year in education. He spent about half of his career in a neighboring school district as a social studies teacher, assistant principal, and principal. His time in the neighboring school district helped him realize the freedom that the Forrestglen principals have when making decisions and making changes since there is no teachers’ union in Forrestglen. While in Forrestglen School District, he spent nine years as principal of the middle school and three years as principal of the high school of one of the school district’s communities. When Maple became interim superintendent, Oak became an assistant superintendent with personnel as his largest job responsibility. Oak looks for teachers with leadership potential and is aware of any Forrestglen teachers going through administrative preparation programs. He is also in charge of the assistant principal induction program which Oak claimed that he uses to grow and develop assistant principals into principals.

However, he insisted that the school district leaders will hire the best candidate, not just the internal candidate for a leadership position.

Pine is a long-time elementary principal (EP) in Forrestglen School District who is highly regarded and would be hard to replace, according to Oak (AS). Pine has served as the principal of his school for 12 years. During that time, he has groomed and trained five assistant principals, three of which, to date, have become principals. Although he began his teaching career in Forrestglen, Pine's teaching background included working in small schools in another state, in medium-sized schools in Colorado, and in a large high school with almost 2,000 students. Pine also served as an assistant principal for two years in Forrestglen prior to his appointment as principal. Pine says that he has continued to work as a principal and in the school district because he loves his job. He explained the reason why he loves his job:

Because, as a team, my staff and me, we have created an environment where students are successful. They are happy and our school community is happy with what we are doing. And I feel that part is something that we have worked years on and it didn't happen overnight. It's kind of, you know, a football coach coming in, from scratch, and making a new football team. It's like once you have got it there, you still have to work really hard to keep it there...With our expectations, and our rigor, and our procedures throughout the school, and just the relationships that we expect with all of the kids and our parents and each other. Those things are things that we have worked really hard on.

All of this hard work shows in the hallways and in the classrooms of the K-5 school with just under 600 students. It is clear that there are high expectations for all students since college pennants and posters decorate the halls in addition to student writing samples. The classrooms are bright and cheery as students and teachers work together on a myriad of projects and assignments.

Pine emphasized the importance of relationships and growth. He said that principals were in "the people business, the people-growing business" and described how

he continued to learn and grow as leader while he grew his assistant principals, teacher leaders, teachers, and students. In regard to principal support, Pine recognized that there is much more structured and formal support for new principals and assistant principals now. When Pine was appointed as principal 12 years ago, there was not any formal orientation or the assignment of a mentor. He claimed that the superintendent said, “Alright. It’s your ship now,” and Pine reported to the school and started doing what he thought he should be doing.

Elm is in his first year as high school principal (HP) after serving for two years as the middle school principal within the same community. Elm has spent all of his ten-year career in education in the Forrestglen School District as a teacher, athletic director/assistant principal, middle school principal, and, now, high school principal. His father was a school administrator and Elm went into education with the goal of becoming an administrator after getting a few years of teaching experience. He believes that, for the community in which he serves, it is important for the school leaders to be a part of the community saying, “A lot of times, it is who fits in our community. Not only do you have to be a school leader, but you have to be that focal point of the community because it’s such a small community.” Elm wants to have the best school in the school district and he is loyal to his community where his wife is also a teacher and his children attend the elementary school.

Elm attended a preparation program at a nearby university and valued the hands on learning from the internship, the other people in the program and their experiences, as much, if not more, than the actual coursework. Oak, the current assistant superintendent, was Elm’s principal when Elm first entered school administration. Elm spoke with

respect and gratitude for the experiences and mentoring that Oak had given him that he reported prepared him to be successful in his current role. Oak made sure that each year Elm had different responsibilities so that within three years, he was ready to be a principal. Elm earned two of his leadership positions through a competitive interview process but was appointed by Maple, the superintendent, to his current position as high school principal. Maple explained that she needed to downsize the school district office administrators as part of over a million dollar budget cut, that Elm was prepared to take on the principalship of the high school, and that the other administrator who was being transferred was a better fit for the middle school. From Elm's perspective, the high school needed some structure and someone to "tighten the ship a little bit and they thought I was the person for that job." Elm also remarked, if the same opportunity occurred again, he would want to be interviewed so he could say that he "won the position."

**Forrestglen School District succession practices.** Forrestglen School District leaders select principals using a traditional screening and interview process. The Forrestglen administrators respect input from the various stakeholders and go out to the school to "hear what their wishes and dreams are for leadership and what they are looking for" when there is a principal opening. Because the ability for principals to establish and maintain relationships is a quality that is highly valued by the Forrestglen administrators, Oak (AS) makes lots of reference calls beyond professional references listed on each final candidate's application. Oak expressed that finding a principal that wants to be part of the local community in which he/she is serving is important, "Someone that is multiply involved in the community because, in the role of principal in

these small towns that we live in, here in Forrestglen, you are the hub.” While input from a school-based committee is important, the superintendent makes the final hiring decision. Maple (S) summarized the Forrestglen selection process in this way:

We follow our policies. We follow our protocols. We do value input. At the end of the day, we have to make a decision: what is best for the schools, the students, the staff. And usually they are pretty similar to how our committees feel and so that’s always a plus. Just finding the best fit for that community or that building.

After hiring the best candidate, Oak (AS) and other school district administrators work with the new principal to lay out a transition plan for the first three to four months. One of the first transition activities is a three to four hour meeting between the school district office personnel and the newly hired principal. According to Oak, “The agenda is: let’s talk about your school, let’s talk about some past, let’s talk about current, and let’s talk about future. And then let’s help design a game plan.” This plan includes a way to meet with stakeholders that Oak dubbed the “Listening Tour.” He explained that every new principal was tasked with meeting with various stakeholders and listening to their hopes and desires for the school. Elm (HP) had conducted a listening tour when he moved from serving as principal at a middle school to principal at a high school which he claimed was beneficial. He understood that his job was to listen, and not to respond:

[I] just had two ears and one mouth. [I] didn’t talk much and just listened to what they had to say and I think the ability to have those teachers speak their mind and say what they say, ”This isn’t working very good,” or “We need to restructure this.” And then when it happened, it provided the feeling of, “Hey, listen! Maybe he does listen to us.” That was a great way to do it and I think that it really helped me.

Oak (AS) noticed that transitions and the approach by the district office administrators with parents, staff, and community members looks different due to the

different situations. In cases where there has been a long-seated, successful principal Oak tries to build support early. He stated:

You try to address that right up front with them, because they [parents and staff] will have that expectation and sometimes it creates a position where the new principal can't be successful because they can't do the things that the former principal does and then you automatically have some frustration and some parents get mad.

Oak went on to comment that if the former principal was not successful, as was the case a few years ago, "it was not hard to get them [the new principal] support because it was so bad the year before." By working closely with the newly appointed principal, the district office administrators can provide the support and guidance necessary for success.

Oak (AS) runs the administrator induction program which includes quarterly seminars on topics such as school law, curriculum, public relations, and staff evaluations aimed mostly at assistant principals because assistant principals usually need to complete induction. Oak wants assistant principals to have experienced all aspects of running a school from budgeting to personnel to instruction so that they are ready to accept a principal position when there are openings.

In Forrestglen, principal meetings are mostly professional learning for the principals with understanding the rubric for the new teacher evaluation system being an area of focus this year. Pine (EP) mentioned a shift towards more professional learning at principal meetings, "At our principal meetings there is definitely frequent times, where, as principals, we are learning together as far as leadership pieces and evaluation pieces and different things that are for our role." This year the principals are also conducting some classroom observations with another principal as a form of professional development. Elm (HP) discussed the value of principals learning together saying,

“There is always something we can draw from other principals.” The evaluation process for principals was seen as another avenue for principal growth and development.

As part of the ongoing support and development, the school district administrators, the school leaders, and the school board members work closely together, according to Forrestglen leaders. Each of the five school board members represent a different area of the school district. While I was visiting the school district, each principal presented a 30-minute report detailing the school’s goals, progress, and challenges to the school board, feeder area principals, school district administrators, and other interested parties. The school board members asked questions and endorsed each principal’s plan. Maple (S) affirmed that principals have stayed in the district because of “the help and support that we give them, a feeling [that] they are part of this team. We lead together.”

During my visit, the superintendent was also in the process of holding four community meetings for the purpose of listening to community people regarding their dreams for the school district. During the open forum, about 25 attendees were able to respond to questions regarding opportunities for the school district in the next one to three years, greatest challenges facing the school district, strengths of the district, priorities based on funding, and avenues for effective communication between the school district and the community. Maple explained that when she was appointed as interim superintendent, some people were rebelling against the school district so she “calmed the waters and said, ‘This is our focus.’” She claimed that these community meetings were part of ongoing efforts to be “very open” and “do a lot of positive work out there.”



Development for potential leaders and principals is important to the administrators in Forrestglen. Elm (HP) mentioned that principals are expected to identify potential future leaders and encourage them. Although the school district does not have close partnerships with universities or any particular leadership preparation program, the school district leaders have benefitted from teachers taking advantage of several different preparation programs. The school district leaders and principals provide numerous leadership opportunities for teachers completing their leadership preparation programs by putting them in charge of building committees and assigning them leadership responsibilities which “takes a little bit off of the principal.” Oak (AS) proposed that putting these teachers in leadership positions was valuable for the Forrestglen system:

We are able to see how they are able to handle [leadership responsibilities]. We do a little pre-evaluation on them. They are being evaluated the whole time on how they do. Then when we do have openings come up and those folks apply, then we have an idea of what kind of leader they are going to be: How do they get people to follow? Do they lead by example? Or do they lead by delegating? How do they lead?

Oak (AS) further commented that Forrestglen administrators focus on hiring assistant principals that will eventually be principals:

Our goal is to grow our assistant principals to be a principal, because that is why they are there. We didn’t hire them to be an assistant principal for 20 years. We hired them, and we tell them that up front, “We are not hiring you as an assistant principal. We look forward to you developing into a principal, and this is our plan to help you get there.”

Although there is a strong tradition of hiring from within, Oak made it clear that they will hire the best, saying:

So we try to grow our own but we won’t limit it [the selection] to our people....So we will hire the best person for the job. Our internal candidates, we just know

them so well so we know they fit. If they are in the community, they fit and they will have a good opportunity to get the job, but not necessarily given the job.

Thus, the succession cycle from leader preparation and development to principal selection is a tight loop in Forrestglen School District.

### **Ridgetop School District Profile**

Ridgetop School District is located in western Colorado, long-known for being a vacation destination for hunters and fishermen. There are about a dozen schools including serving two distinct communities. Ridgetop School District was chosen for participation in this study due to its high teacher satisfaction according to the TELL Colorado Survey for school districts with higher than average student demographic factors.

**Ridgetop School District participant profiles.** Peak, the assistant superintendent (AS) whose main responsibility in leading the human resources department, has worked for the school district for 13 years. Peak was hired as an assistant principal, quickly moved into a principal position, and then has worked in the school district office for the last several years. He is proud of the principal selection process that he put in place in the school district. He enjoys working in a rural school district and aspires to serve as a rural superintendent when he completes his doctoral degree.

Summit is one of the newer administrators in Ridgetop serving in her third year as an elementary principal (EP). She spent the first 16 years of her career working in nearby school district as an elementary teacher, middle school teacher, English as a Second Language teacher and instructional coach, and as a reading instructional coach. She indicated that she could not imagine going straight from the classroom to the

principalship and that she was grateful for all the professional development regarding instruction and years of experience serving as an instructional coach in her prior school district. The elementary school where she is principal has a fairly stable teaching staff and has only had three principals in the last 18 years. She, like all the elementary principals in the school district, is a solo administrator without an assistant principal. In her third year, Summit is feeling more secure about the management side of running the school which was her biggest learning curve. She is appreciative of the community and the opportunity to raise her children in the community.

Boulder is a seasoned middle school principal (MP) who has spent his entire 24 year career at the middle school level. He was a social studies teacher for 12 years and an assistant principal for one year before coming to the Ridgetop School District. He moved to Ridgetop when he was appointed as the assistant principal at one of the school district's middle schools after seeing the position advertised on the Colorado Association of School Executive's (CASE) website. He served in that position for four years and is currently in his twelfth year as principal at the same middle school. When asked about his longevity in the school district and in his position, Boulder replied:

I'm very comfortable with the school. I have a lot of good friends. I like the school. I like my environment. You know, there are just things about the job that I really enjoy. And part of it is, when you've done it as long as I have, you begin to ask questions of "I have five or six more years left, if I want to. So, do I want to go and create a whole new?" It takes a while to build the culture you want. It takes a while to build the climate in the teachers, and all those kinds of things, your support systems. "Do I want to re-build that? Do I want to go somewhere and re-build that?" There's just things that keep me here.

Although Boulder reflected that he does not need that much support, he recognized that the school district leaders were being more cognizant to support new leaders.

**Ridgetop School District succession practices.** In terms of succession practices, Ridgetop leaders have focused attention on hiring principals that are a good fit for both the school with a vacancy and the school district. Peak, the assistant superintendent (AS), explained that due to the distance of their school district to Colorado's larger cities and metro areas that it is sometimes difficult to attract and retain quality principal candidates. He and the superintendent have developed a new system for hiring principals which, according to Peak, has yielded higher quality candidates that are a good fit for the community and school district.

The selection process for principals starts with Peak (AS) working with the school's staff to determine the qualities of the future principal. Peak leads the process by working with the entire staff in a collaborative "jigsaw" where they brainstorm answers to the following questions:

What does the school need, in terms of leadership? What is the school very good at, in terms of what experts do they currently have? What do they [the school staff and students] need expertise in? What are some of the cultural background issues or traditions that people need to be aware of? And then, if they were to pick one or two leadership qualities that they really needed or wanted, what would those be?

Peak leads the parent group through the same process. From the input gathered from both groups, he writes a job description that is specific to the particular opening and the needs of the school district according to himself and the superintendent. Peak claimed that the applicant pool has been stronger when he has written and posted a more specific job opening rather than using a generic job description. Peak then culls through the applications looking for a match between the potential candidate's skills, the school's needs in a leader, and school district's needs. Peak checks references before the inviting candidates in for an interview as well.

The selection process is a full-day process for the candidates involving a three-step interview: the administrative interview, the site-based interview, and the walkthrough. For the administrative interview, the candidate prepares a presentation on school level student data and a possible action plan, which is presented to several of the school district's school and central office administrators. In the site-based interview, the candidate interviews with a large group that represents the various stakeholders of the school (teachers, classified staff, and parents). In the walkthrough, a key staff member, usually the head secretary, escorts each candidate through the building and classrooms to see how the candidate interacts with various constituents. The day ends with a "Meet and Greet" session where all of the potential candidates mingle with interested stakeholders. Peak emphasized that each group or individual does not rank the candidates or give a recommendation regarding which candidate to hire, but rather, individuals and groups report candidates' strengths and weaknesses. Finally, Peak and the superintendent review all of the input and then the superintendent makes the final decision.

Summit, who is a current elementary principal (EP) in Ridgetop School District, echoed Peak's sentiments saying that the principal selection process was "exhausting" and "thorough." Summit went through the selection process twice. She did not receive the first principal position, which she thinks was a good decision because in her words, "I don't think I would have been a good fit there at all." A few weeks later, there was another elementary principal opening in the Ridgetop School District. Summit repeated the process again and secured the principal position at her school to which she concluded, "This was a much better fit for me. So it worked out." Although Boulder (MP) said that there has been little recent turnover in the secondary principal positions, he is aware that

“the process has gotten a lot more rigorous” in the last three years in contrast to the interview he had several years ago. He conveyed that he is not sure if he would be hired today if he had to compete for his principal position using the current selection process.

As soon as a candidate is chosen, Peak (AS) works with that person and the exiting administrator to begin the transition process. It is a goal to get the new principal in the building for a couple of days before the end of the school year so that the new principal can start meeting people and figuring out any staffing issues. Peak thinks that it is important for the new principal to hire some of the teachers in the school since it creates a bond:

So new people are more apt to give new principals kind of a break. Whereas some of the veteran staff, which is basically all staff prior to you, they’re going to watch and see what you do and what you say, and they’re going to decide whether or not they’re going to support you. And so one of the things we try to do right out of the gate is, whenever possible, let the newbie hire positions.

Peak meets with the exiting principal to make decisions about tasks, meetings, and responsibilities that must be complete. He also sets up an initial meeting between the outgoing and the incoming principal and then allows the incoming principal can decide how much or little to communicate with the outgoing principal. As the transition progresses, Peak and the superintendent meet with the new principal for the initial onboarding:

We do little things like try and get them keys, cell phones, and laptops as soon as possible. But, that has to be balanced with the other person closing out their year and getting all their paperwork done and all of that. So that’s more of a kind of one-on-one interpersonal relationship, nothing formalized, and then we just talk to them quite a bit and just kind of have some ongoing conversations.

New principals in Ridgetop who need formal administrator induction receive it in conjunction with another local school district. The induction program has six two-hour

meetings that focus on leadership skills and understanding the principal evaluation rubric. New administrators are also assigned a mentor and receive some coaching from Peak and other school district administrators.

In Ridgetop, there are several monthly meetings for principals. The District Leadership Team (DLT) meetings include principals, assistant principals, and school district leaders and are focused on the following three strands: leadership, learning, and communication. The school district leaders also conduct leadership book studies and host conversations around leadership and leadership development during the DLT meetings. There are separate monthly meetings for elementary and secondary principals that assistant principals attend depending on the topic and at the discretion of the principal. Peak (AS) remarked that, although the topics of the level principal meetings are generally related to each other, they are conducted separately in recognition that “their worlds are different: assessment’s different, instruction’s different. So in those meetings we do a lot more nuts and bolts at the school level type thing.” Additionally, Peak has assigned the principals to groups of four or five principals for the purpose of conducting classroom observations together, discussing, and calibrating feedback on instruction in an effort to “make sure that we have a common dialogue about what we’re looking for, what we saw, and what kind of feedback would we give the teacher and why.”

Ridgetop leaders do not have strong connections with any university preparation programs. Furthermore, the role of assistant principal is not a guarantee for a principalship in Ridgetop. Although administrators in Ridgetop post internally first for any teaching positions, all administrator positions are open and advertised on CASE and

other education recruitment websites. Assistant principals are not hired by team of school district administrators, but rather by the principal of the school with the opening who is given a directive from Peak (AS) and district office leaders to remember that:

When you're hiring an assistant principal, you're hiring a future principal. So don't hire a cop, hire somebody who's going to become a principal. And that's the principals job is to coach up and train their APs [assistant principals] so...and we basically tell them they've basically have two or three years as APs and then we will start considering them for principalships.

Although the school district office administrators have some involvement with the development of assistant principals, there is not a close relationship between the development of future leaders and the principal selection process in Ridgetop. Peak (AS) described it as an open competition and said, "May the best person win."

### **Common Practices among the School Districts with High Colorado Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning Survey Results**

When examining the principal succession practices of selected Colorado school districts with high TELL survey results, three similarities emerged. In regard to succession practices, leaders from Colorfield, Forrestglen, and Ridgetop school districts value and include stakeholder input in the principal selection process. School district administrators have a process that is used to solicit information from the school's stakeholders in terms of characteristics of the next principal and needs of the school. Another commonality is that principal meetings are a mix of business and professional development for the principals. The professional development topics seem timely and focused on high impact areas, such as the new teacher evaluation system. Finally, leaders in all three school districts provide a transition plan that is tailored to the needs of the



incoming principal. The school district leaders are committed to making sure that the new principal is set up for success.

In addition to stakeholder input during the principal selection process, these school districts involve stakeholders in other aspects of the school district. Four aspects of the relationship between teachers and building principals emerged when analyzing data from these school districts with high TELL results that are discussed in the next section:

- Teachers' input is valued and acted upon
- Teachers are trusted and treated as professionals
- Principals genuinely care about staff and students
- Principals are leaders that teachers follow

**Teachers' input must be valued and acted upon.** School district leaders stressed the importance of having stakeholders, especially teachers, involved in decision making. Although there is not a teachers' union in Forrestglen School District, there is a formal system of involving teachers in decisions across the school district. The Coordinating Council is a group of staff members who work with the superintendent and cabinet regarding salaries, budgets, and other important topics. Likewise, White (EP) in Colorfield, remarked on the importance of teacher input:

I think we're a very teacher-centered district. I know at the district level there is often, I would say, significant efforts to engage teachers throughout the decision-making process....For the most part, our teachers are accustomed to that and I think they appreciate the level of involvement that they've had in the past.

Turquoise (HAP) stated that there had been times in the last 10 years that teachers did not feel that their input is valued or acted upon which had led to animosity between teachers and principals at the building level or between the schools and the school district and a

feeling of “Us vs. Them.” Pewter (AS) affirmed this saying that some previous administrations had asked for feedback but not responded to it. He felt that approach was a mistake, “Our people are smart. It didn’t take them long to realize, you don’t give a crap what you are asking me.” Pewter added that the school district leaders have been more authentic in asking for feedback and have tried to be more responsive also.

At the building level, many principals discussed different ways that teachers were involved and gave input into how the school was managed including serving on hiring, student climate, or leadership committees. For example, Elm (HP) uses the members of his leadership team to gather feedback from staff saying:

Their input is valued and it works both ways. Our teachers that are not on the leadership team can provide input to the leadership team and it trickles to me and it doesn’t have to be direct words. So I think there is some value to that. They feel again like they are part of the overall goal and overall outlook.

The solicitation of teacher input in the aspects of the school district helps foster relationships between principals and teachers which may lead to stronger retention of both principals and teachers.

**Teachers must be trusted and treated as professionals.** Principals in these three school districts expressed their belief in their teachers and in their teaching abilities. In Forrestglen, Elm (HP) discussed supporting teachers to become masterful at instruction. He stated that it was important to not “micromanage” teachers, but rather, to “empower people,” “get out of their way,” and “provide them support when they need it.” Both Green (MP) and White (EP) in Colorfield responded that they were careful not to micromanage teachers either. Green expressed that it is important to give teachers roles, to trust them to do their jobs, and to “treat teachers as the professionals they really are.”

White stated:

I think in our most successful schools teachers feel empowered. They feel trusted. You know, we hire really smart people who make good decisions, so we don't really try to micromanage them. And when you have a school that does, they will leave.

Likewise, Summit (EP) in Ridgetop discussed how she tried to empower her teachers and had the feeling that the former principal may have been a micromanager. In contrast, she said, "I'm more about capacity. I want to see lots of capacity built. So I hope the building capacity and feeling value and purpose lends itself to why people stay." Principals from all three school district concurred that teachers need to be empowered, trusted, and treated as professionals.

The attitudes of the principals seemed to be aligned with the attitudes of the school district leaders in each district also. Oak (AS) discussed that school district leaders "believe in them [the teachers] and treat them as professionals," adding, "We tell them that we have a scope and sequence. We have a map, that's *what* needs to get done. You take care of *how* it gets done. We don't micromanage that." Pewter (AS) used the words "smart" and "high quality" to describe the teachers in Colorfield. Additionally, Peak (AS) mentioned that the school district leaders in Ridgetop put an emphasis on the TELL survey results regarding teacher satisfaction to inform the school district leaders about the culture at each school site.

**Principals genuinely care about staff and students.** Participants in all three school districts with high TELL results emphasized that principals must care about the staff and students. Maple (S) from Forrestglen stressed the importance of caring relationships and discussed what happened when that caring relationship was absent:

I think that are teachers believe that our principals care about them....My principal that probably has the least following is...and he says he cares, but his actions don't show it so much. And you have to be the whole package for your staff to follow you.

Similarly, Oak (AS) stated, “Our principals have a bond with their staff and the ones that don’t, are the ones that aren’t principals anymore.” Pine (EP) reiterated the thoughts of Maple and Oak and connected a principal’s ability to work with people to the success of a school:

It comes down to relationships, because the whole building is going to be determined on how the leadership’s relationships are with teachers, with students... We’re in the people business, the people growing business so I just feel like that piece has to be a non-negotiable, because I don’t care how much you know about theory or instructional effectiveness and all that. If you can’t get your teachers to buy into you as a person, then your whole school isn’t going to have that culture that is really healthy.

Pine further added that he was convinced that his teachers and staff knew that he believed in them and that he would do anything to help them be successful. Green (MP) had lots of little ways that she demonstrated her caring including calling, touching base with people, sending personal birthday cards, celebrating successes, and constantly affirming things that were going well. Green (MP) summed up the reasons that teachers have positive feelings regarding her as principal, “I’d say first to all, establishing relationships is the foundation. And I’ve worked really hard to do that, let staff really know I care about them, get to know them, as individuals, work to support them.”

One way that principals demonstrate that care for teachers is through support. Several principals such as Boulder (MP) mentioned that the teachers “know I’ll support them.” Oak (AS) stated when there were diverse opinions about education, “Our building principals are right there to back the teacher up.... So the principals fight the fight and they take it on and the staff really appreciates that.” Teachers seem to have more positive feelings toward the building leadership when principals have personal, caring, supportive relationships with their teachers.

**Principals must be leaders that teachers follow.** School district leaders in these school districts with high TELL results discussed that principals must be leaders who teachers follow. In Forrestglen School District, both the superintendent and assistant superintendent discussed selecting principals that teachers will follow. Maple (S) proclaimed:

I think they have to be able to create quality leadership and through that they have to be someone that people will follow as well. They can be the best and the brightest but if they don't have those skills, to have those good relationships, they'll be dead.

She added, "If they say 'I' all the time, that worries me. Usually when I speak it's 'we.' I know that is an odd thing. But I want someone that, together, we will be successful."

Finding a candidate that wanted to be part of the community and establish close relationships with community members is part of the Forrestglen criteria for selection.

Elm (HP) mentioned that building relationships is part of the in-service program for principals before school starts each year "centered around relationships and building that teamwork-type attitude within your building and ways to get people on board, not top down. It's not top down. It's how to get them to follow you and those types of things."

In Ridgetop School District, Peak (AS) mentioned the use of surveys with the teaching staff. He said that they used the TELL survey results when it was administered and that building principals were required to administer a survey to staff every year and sometimes they surveyed parents too. Although Peak admitted that, at times, these surveys created angst for the principals, yet, he stated that it was important for the school district leaders to know the perceptions of the teachers, staff, and parents were of the principal:

And depending on how things are going culturally, we'll either kind of give them [the surveys] a once over and say, "Yea, go ahead and send it out." and then we get the results. If we have questions or concerns we really look at them [the surveys]. I mean we will say, "You have to ask this question bank." "You ask this question: 'Do you trust the leadership to support teachers when it comes to student discipline?' You will ask that question because we don't think they trust you."

These survey results were usually tied to the principal's goals and the principals receive coaching around any issues that surface through the principal evaluation process.

### **Succession Practices of School Districts with High Principal Retention Rates: Answer to Research Question #2**

Since lack of stability in leadership and short tenures of principals has been linked to issues in school improvement (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010), I selected three districts that had high principal retention within their respective student demographic bands to investigate regarding their principal succession practices. Colorfield School District with 90.28%, Meadowview School District with 92.86%, and Riverbend School District with 86.36% principal retention rate all had principal retention rates above the state average of 83.31% from 2011-12 to 2012-13 as reported by CDE (2012f). I used data from interviews and documents to answer Research Question 2: What are the principal succession practices of large school districts with high principal retention rates when controlling for student demographics? I briefly profile each participant and describe the principal succession practices in Meadowview and Riverbend School Districts since I have already introduced the participants and succession practices in Colorfield. I then discuss the similarities among practices and any themes that emerged. A summary of these school districts, participant position, role as it relates to this study on principal succession practices, participant name, years in their current

administrative position, and years in their current school district is provided in Table 10.

Additionally, a table of my working notes regarding the succession practices of

Colorfield, Meadowview, and Ridgetop is located in Appendix F.

Table 10

*Individual Participants' Position, Role in the Study, and Years of Experience from School Districts with High Principal Retention Rates*

School district	Participant position and abbreviation	Participant role in study	Participant	Years in position	Years in school district
Colorfield	Assistant Superintendent (AS)	Hires and supervises elementary principals	Pewter	2	5
	Elementary Principal (EP)	Veteran principal	White	10	12+
	Middle School Principal (MP)	Veteran principal	Green	22	40
	High School Asst. Principal (HAP)	New (assistant) principal	Turquoise	1	13+
Meadowview	Director of Human Resources (HRD)	Manages hiring process and supports principals	Sage	4	22
	Elementary Principal (EP)	Veteran principal	Columbine	10	23
	Middle Principal (MP)	Newer principal	Sedge	4	16
Riverbend	Assistant Superintendent (AS)	Provides professional development, hires and supervises secondary principals	Eddy	2	2
	Director of Human Resources (HRD)	Manages hiring process	Stream	9	9
	Elementary Principal (EP)	New principal	Brook	2	2
	High School Principal (HP)	Veteran principal	Banks	10	13

### **Meadowview School District Profile**

Meadowview School District is a school district located near a large city and surrounded by several other school districts along the Front Range of Colorado.

Meadowview has just under 10,000 K-12 students and 1,200 staff members across 16 schools. The schools in Meadowview serve a diverse mix of students within boundaries

that cover a large geographic area. Meadowview was chosen for participation in this study due to its high principal retention rate amongst school districts with average student demographic factors.

**Meadowview School District participant profiles.** Sage, the Director for Human Resources (HRD), has spent 22 years, or almost his entire career, in the school district. Sage worked as a junior and senior high teacher, coach, and assistant principal at a few schools, and has served as a school district administrator for the past seven years, three as the Assistant Director and four as the Director of Human Resources. Sage is a leader in the local area's human resource administrator group and, thus, is aware of how Meadowview School District is and is not similar to surrounding school districts. He leads the principal hiring process, the principal induction program, and works with other local school district and university leaders to offer leadership preparation programs. He is dedicated and loyal to the school district. He is proud of the work that Meadowview leaders have done as evidenced by his hospitality to me and as evidenced by an extensive tour of the school district given to me. Sage is also reflective and cognizant of the benefits and drawbacks of the size of the school district, the culture of hiring from within, and the some of the other practices.

Sage claimed from the start of the project that I, as an outside researcher, would not be "blown away by our systems" or "find any magic bullets" but that I would "find is a unique set of factors that aid in our retention." Sage stated that the school district leaders were not very policy-driven, but rather they have customs and traditions that he called "the Meadowview Way" that can be challenging for outsiders to learn. The Meadowview Way included ways of communicating, expectations for administrators,



common language for programs, and a teaching and learning cycle that was used in all the schools. Sage emphasized the importance of communication to help people new to the system be successful:

I would say that most of everything we do is going to be based on what makes sense and what have we done historically....And they [new people] have to talk. They have to talk and they have to communicate because if they guess, they can guess wrong. And so our practice is very much to do things in person.

Columbine is the longest tenured principal having served as principal of an elementary school (EP) for the last 10 years. She has spent her entire education career, minus one year in another state and one year in another country, in Meadowview working as a teacher, an assistant principal, and now as a principal. She was encouraged to and then chose to participate in a leadership preparation cohort sponsored by the school district. Upon completing the program, Columbine interviewed and was selected as a shared assistant principal at two elementary schools. She credited the experience of being split between two different schools, working with two different principals, getting to know a thousand students, their families, and 90 staff members as the experience that most prepared her for her successful tenure as an elementary principal. After three years as an assistant principal, the superintendent approached her about her interest in serving as principal at one of the two schools where she worked. Although Columbine was seven months pregnant at the time, she accepted the challenge and was appointed to the position of principal at the same time that the school became a visual and performing arts focus school. Columbine admitted that her appointment is not how it was usually done and that now the interview process makes it “fair game for all” but acknowledged that “because of the transition within the district I don’t think he [the superintendent] felt comfortable naming three schools as focus schools and not having a principal at one of them.”

Columbine has high expectations for her staff and has changed the grade level of several teachers in an effort to get them to “move their thinking, the way they work, [or] to get them to team” always for the benefit of the students. Columbine also explained that she is intentional about everything she plans, that she carves out time to build the staff up, and that her staff know she cares about each staff member.

Sedge is a long-time Meadowview employee who attended elementary, junior high, and high school in the school district as well. He is in his fourth year serving as the principal at the middle school (MP) where he attended school years ago. He taught at the high school level and joined one of the leadership cohorts that the school district personnel promoted. He completed the preparation program together with one of his coaching and teaching colleagues who is currently serving as his assistant principal.

Prior to becoming a principal, Sedge gained administrative experience working in the assessment office and as a high school assistant principal in charge of discipline and building management. Sedge commented that he was thankful to have experience on the instructional and management side of school leadership, crediting these prior experiences with helping him ease into the principalship. Sedge appreciated the support and guidance that other Meadowview leaders have given him through the years and has encouraged and supported several teachers to become administrators saying,

You know, I was developed through other administrators....Those people guided me. Now I've done that for other principals in this district. The principal who is over at another middle school for one, my assistant principal here, my dean now, teachers within our building...It's funny, both assistant principals at one of the high schools I mentored and they worked with me in my office and the principal now at another elementary school. They were teachers when I knew them, just like me. I worked with others and then we showed them why we do what we do and how we do it.

Sedge described his work as a principal in the Meadowview School District as enjoyable, but intense. He said that he liked the people with whom he worked and that he liked his job. These statements were evident as Sedge and I walked the halls of his school which showed the school's history and school spirit through posters, displays, and t-shirts worn by the students. I met several faculty members who were proud of their work and the school district and who had dedicated their careers to the students of Meadowview as well. I also met a few newer teachers who were excited Meadowview graduates just beginning their careers in their home school district.

**Meadowview School District succession practices.** The Meadowview School District leaders have a long history of hiring people from the community to serve as teachers and leaders. Sage (HRD), explained that between one quarter and one third of the teachers come from within the community and that all of the current sitting principals worked in the school district prior to becoming a principal with the majority of them serving as an assistant principal and a teacher. In fact, 14 out of the 16 current principals served as teachers in Meadowview.

Every principal position is posted internally before it is posted externally, each internal candidate is granted an interview, and then each internal candidate is notified in person as to whether or not he/she received the position. In general, Meadowview administrators use a three-step principal selection process with an interview with a building-based representative group, a written component, and an interview with the superintendent and the assistant superintendents. Sage works with the staff at the building to define building needs, craft questions, and create a building level interview committee that is representative of the staff and the parents. This committee interviews

candidates and identifies strengths and weaknesses of each candidate. Sage emphasized the importance of the input by the committee and the success of the new principal:

So, that's very crucial to have that, to have all the stakeholders involved and it rallies the troops, so to speak. When somebody is selected, it's not seemingly out of left field. When they [the newly selected principal] step into that building and they already have some support. They have at least the whole committee, if [*sic*], usually the key members of that building, I'm sure, behind them because they know that they've had major impact in that decision.

Sage did mention that at times the superintendent has conducted follow up conversations with the committee if there may be disagreement as to who is the best candidate. Also, there have been occasions, depending on the situation and candidates, that the superintendent has appointed a principal.

Both principals that participated in the study and Sage discussed that, although some people say that the Meadowview School District is known for only hiring people from the Meadowview community or those whom are "homegrown," that is not true. All three participants mentioned several leaders, including assistant principals and school district office administrators, who had recently been hired from outside of the school district. Sage explained that the top school district administrators have made it clear that they will hire the best person for the job, saying, "We're not just going to hire from within. We're going to hire the best available and that's important. I think people like that."

Transition for the new principal usually happens in the spring since most of the time the newly hired principal is already a school district employee. The Meadowview leaders like to involve the assistant principals in staffing and budget decisions which can assist them transitioning to a new position if they are selected as the new principal. The new principal hires teachers for the fall "so that they already have that connection with

their new staff.” The new principal also works with the staff some in the spring so that when fall comes, the veteran staff is familiar and comfortable with the new principal.

Principals in Meadowview attend principal meetings and professional development classes on a regular basis. Principal meetings are a combination of business and professional development. The school district leaders provide a robust professional development system where principals are expected to take classes, as well as teach classes. For the last few years, there has been an intense focus on improving instructional practices through the creation, refinement, and implementation of a teaching and learning cycle. Principal professional development has focused on the teaching and learning cycle along with literacy strategies. Both Sedge (MP) and Columbine (EP) expressed value in the courses that the district has provided.

In the last few years, Meadowview School District personnel have been intentional about engaging and valuing input from their staff. There is not a large teachers’ union presence. Rather, groups of teachers and administrators have met to develop a teaching and learning cycle, get input on salary and working conditions, help determine aspects of the teacher evaluation system, and work on other pertinent issues. Some of the groups are decision-making bodies, some are advisory, and others help with communication between teachers and administrators. There is a sense that these committees are productive, provide many teachers with leadership opportunities, and help initiatives rollout in a positive fashion. These committees, surveys, and communication about decisions have helped people feel like their voices are heard. Columbine, an elementary principal (EP), remarked that the school district administration was mindful to listen to and respond to input. For example, Columbine declared that there had been

times when initiatives were pulled back or changed in a deliberate attempt “to find some way to support teachers because there’s no way we can add one more thing to their plate without taking something off their plate.” Furthermore, Columbine indicated that the school district leaders were conscientious to provide the same courtesies for administrators and had adjusted expectations, professional development, and meetings in an effort to support and help the principals.

The school district administrators have also partnered with another area school district to provide an administrator induction program. Participants in the program meet monthly to receive practical information on various topics that the administrators can use with the staff, parents, and community in the area. While the induction program meets the requirements of the State, it also provides explanations of how various aspects of school leadership look inside Meadowview. Sage explained, “So we just tailor everything to us. And so, I would like to think that it’s applicable elsewhere. But, no offense to anybody, we’re not training them to be elsewhere. We’re training them to be here.”

Support for principals within Meadowview is high touch. The majority of the district administrators have been principals and/or assistant principals within the district and “have sat in the principal’s seat.” Sage (HRD) said that principals could call any district administrator at any time, for any reason. Columbine (EP) and Sedge (MP) echoed this sentiment adding that school district administrators frequently visit the buildings, sometimes for scheduled visits and often to just check-in. Additionally, there is a system of support for both struggling principals and new assistant principals which Sage called the Principal Whisperers. The Whisperers are previous Meadowview

administrators who are now retired and are knowledgeable about the district procedures and culture. They work one-on-one with principals and assistant principals to support them behind the scenes. The Whisperers “help them be better and to help them process what they need to do without feeling like they’re being evaluated by us [the school district supervisors].” Sage proposed that the culture had evolved to a point where principals and teachers do not see the assignment of a Whisperer as a sign of weakness, “It’s a cool culture when you can receive that support, that counseling, that direction. And everybody accepts it, acknowledges it openly, and feels good about it. And that’s cool.”

Through the years, Meadowview School District leaders have partnered with several universities and other area school districts on a regular basis to provide leadership preparation cohorts. They are able to provide the instructors and have input into the content of courses to make sure that the preparation meets the school district’s future leadership needs. Sage suggested that the cohorts were mutually beneficial for the teachers and for the school district. With the emphasis on hiring from within, the cohorts are a source of future leaders in Meadowview and Sage indicated that they were “working vigorously to build our bench” of future administrators through the promotion of two different cohorts through two different universities.

The administrators in Meadowview also work hard to develop their assistant principals and want to coach up assistant principals to be good principals rather than make a bad hire or need to remove a principal. However, Sage admitted that they had lost some good potential principal candidates to other school districts due to the high principal retention rates:

You know that slow methodical approach lends itself to great success when you finally get something here, but it can be too slow for some folks. And I understand that, you know. That probably doesn't help our retention [of leadership position candidates] but it definitely helps our success.

With the focus on hiring internally and providing ongoing support so that assistant principals and principals can be successful, the succession practices in Meadowview seem mostly effective in meeting the leadership needs of the school district.

### **Riverbend School District**

Riverbend School District is a school district located in the mountains of Colorado. The area surrounding the school district is filled with opportunities for both winter and summer outdoor sports, hosts a community college, and receives year-round visitors. The school district has about a dozen schools serving just over 5,000 students in three different communities. The school district office is in the largest city in the school district. Riverbend was selected for participation in this study due to its higher principal retention for a school district with higher than average student demographic factors.

**Riverbend School District participant profiles.** This is the second year that Eddy has served as the Assistant Superintendent (AS) in charge of the academic program in the school district. He has been an administrator for about 15 years and has extensive background in preparing and developing leaders:

I had a two-year stint where I actually developed and ran a program recruiting and training charter school leaders. I did a lot of recruitment, pre-service, and did a lot of research around hiring practices. And then I also had a contract with an institute on education leadership reform and they were very interested in hiring practices and evaluation practices so a lot of our work was developing shared understanding and tools around those things.

Eddy is also the supervisor of the high school principals and one of his main responsibilities includes developing principals and assistant principals. He is in charge of



the induction program for administrators which he tailors every year based on the needs of the participants. This year most of the participants are assistant principals so the emphasis is on instructional leadership and making the shift from being a classroom teacher to an administrator.

Eddy expressed strong feelings that educational leadership preparation programs in Colorado are “weak” since they are not standards or competency-based. He described one university program as offering “a smattering of course work. It was not really a developing of talent or a developing of leadership.” In regard to licensure, Eddy articulated, “I’m convinced by the evidence that there’s no value in licensure as a predictor of performance or as a developer of performance so I do not personally value licensure.” He was clear that he wants leaders, rather than administrators who are “just processing forms, or paperwork, or data” or “are good at saying ‘yes’ to authority.” Eddy discussed many strategies to help people grow as leaders including distributing leadership, empowering people to make decisions, and hiring one’s own successor.

The school district’s strategic plan contains a goal around talent development but many of the ideas are not fully flushed out or funded yet. One of Eddy’s ideas is “that we create a principal in training role: that is we hire the principal a year out before we place them and give them a rotation through different roles so they’re really ready to take on the job.” Eddy sees the hiring process for principals as reactive and would like to see a redesign of the pipeline process:

I’ve advocated for a model that would be, identifying people before we have a job so that we actually bring them onboard knowing that they’ll be [next]. Like how the military does it. They don’t wait until they have an opening on a base, and then say “We need a new commander. Let’s put in a want ad.” They already have people who are ready to go. But we haven’t yet figured out the logistics or the financing for more of a pipeline management process.

According to Stream, the Director of Human Resources, Eddy is already making changes in the way that the organization thinks about developing leaders through his work with the talent development goal in Riverbend School District's strategic plan and his leadership of the principal/assistant principal induction program.

Stream has been the Director of Human Resources (HRD) for the nine years and has a master's degree in organizational management. Stream had not worked in education as teacher or a principal prior to her work in the Riverbend School District. Stream is the main contact person for potential administrator candidates and coordinates the hiring process for each open position. She is thorough and has prepared several documents which outline the hiring procedures and the interview guidelines which are used by the school and district administrators. Stream has worked hard to understand competencies needed for successful teachers and principals. Stream feels that Riverbend has good systems in place for hiring but that the school district leaders need to find ways to make the job of principal more do-able.

Brook is in her second year as an elementary principal (EP) at a school that focuses on expeditionary learning. Brook moved from teaching in a large school district on the Front Range to take her first principal position in Riverbend. Brook had teaching experience at a project-based learning school, plus worked in outdoor education and as a camp administrator prior to entering the field of education. Brook expressed that the Riverbend School District leaders were looking for a new leader that could lead a school transformation to a school for expeditionary learning and that her "background in outdoor ed [education], project-based learning, and experiential ed [education], would have been

one of the reasons why I got the job.” Brook believes that the Riverbend School District leaders are “looking for people to inspire teachers” saying:

I know when they spoke to me about the job, they said, “Teachers don’t feel like they have a lot of voice or choice in what they’re doing and they’re not feeling inspired about their teaching.”...So I feel like one thing that they’re looking for is someone who can be real and get behind teachers and inspire them.

Brook believes in empowering teachers and growing teacher leaders in her building saying, “My goal with the teachers in the building is that they would see their selves as people who could design and shape this building.”

Being a new principal, Brook appreciates that her school is close to the school district office so that she can get support from the various professionals and departments when she needs it. She values the support she received in her first year from her induction mentor who happened to be Eddy (AS). Brook also appreciates the professional development and feedback that she has received from the people in a national organization that supports the school’s expeditionary learning efforts.

Banks has served as the high school principal (HP) for the last 10 years and as a site administrator in the school district for the last 13 years. Prior to coming to Riverbend School District, Banks had a wide range of teaching and administrative experiences in schools outside of the United States. He likes being a principal and is always learning. Banks’ office is filled with the newest books on leadership and instruction and he enjoys participating in the professional learning opportunities that Eddy (AS) designs. Banks mentioned that “for a long time, the district has fed, recommended, nudged, pushed, promising teachers into a university principal preparation program” and that he teaches in that program. He recognized the value of encouraging and supporting new leaders as he named several current administrators in whom he had a hand in developing. He

understands the value of developing internal people for leadership positions but believes that leaders still need to define the school district's succession practices:

I think we are at the early stages of a root and branch examination of where we are going to go with that [a processes for recruiting, selecting, and developing principals]. There are some important pieces in place that develop and select and nudging and educating people who are in the district. And a much more developed system of training them so they don't flounder.

Although Banks has been in education since 1977 and recognized that the job of principal has changed as accountability for principals has increased, he still has enthusiasm for the principalship stating, "It's perfectly possible to do a very good job. So I would be just as enthusiastic in 2014 as when I got my first assistant principalship in 1986."

**Riverbend School District succession practices.** Participants within the Riverbend School District expressed the most awareness of the need to grow and change the system for attracting, hiring, and retaining high quality leaders within their schools. The school district leaders, using a process that involved community input, developed a new strategic plan in 2014. The Riverbend Strategic Plan contains a focus area called Talent Development. School district stakeholders have identified five strategies under this area: 1) Align professional development with student learning needs, 2) Provide competitive compensation and benefits, 3) Develop leaders, 4) Create an exceptional work environment, and 5) Recruit the best teachers and leaders. While the individual actions steps, timelines, and funding sources are still being developed for each strategy, both Stream (HRD) and Eddy (AS) discussed the idea of creating a principal-in-training or principal-in-residence program which would be a yearlong position to better prepare leaders to step into the principal role. Additionally, personnel from the Human Resources Department has completed several salary studies in the last few years and

Stream said that she believes that competitive salaries are necessary to attract and retain quality employees at every level.

In the Riverbend School District, the hiring of principals had followed a traditional process of posting, interviewing, and hiring. However, in the last few years, school district personnel have moved away from simply using an interview and have incorporated data analysis and some type of presentation as part of their selection process. Another important aspect of the selection process is involving stakeholders since school district leaders expressed that they value input from the school personnel and students. Stream (HRD) works with the school-based teams and ensures that interview committee members, who represent different groups within the school, list desired principal qualities and generate interview questions. Within the last year, the district has also defined six leader competencies that they will use to shape their hiring process of future principals although they have not had the opportunity to use them. Both Stream (HRD) and Eddy (AS) expressed the need to use more performance assessments as part of their hiring process for school leaders. Stream articulated the need to do more to determine performance: “Really the meat of it is, ‘Are they going to be a good instructional leader?’ and, ‘How do they deliver feedback to teachers?’ I think we need to do a better job with that.”

Riverbend has worked with a few different universities for leadership preparation programs which has helped teachers within the school district secure licensure. Although there are opportunities for teacher leaders and other leaders to serve as teacher mentors, coaches, or lead committees in the schools, there does not seem to be a pipeline that identifies future leaders and prepares them for the principalship. With the current

superintendent and Eddy (AS), there has been a change in the philosophy for hiring assistant principals. There are some long-seated assistant principals that do not have a desire to be a principal but the most recent hires for assistant principal were hired for their future potential to be principals. Eddy explained it this way:

So there's no point in hiring for an assistant principal. Does that make sense? So we should be hiring for the same dispositions, the same qualifications as a principal. They just need this next step in their development before they're ready. We hired some really good assistant principals and we did ask that question: Is this principal material? The superintendent asked that. She actually said, "The reason we're involved in the assistant principal hiring at the level is because we're inviting them to be part of our district leadership team."

Since the arrival of Eddy (AS), the administrator induction program has been overhauled. He has designed a program that is focused on growing leaders and is tailored to the needs of the individuals within the group. The new leaders meet monthly for two to three hours to learn about a variety of topics that both the participants and the district personnel think they need to learn about. The program also includes subject matter experts such as the directors of finance, human resources, or instruction in addition to real assignments for participants to complete. When I visited the district, the assistant principals were embarking on a project to look at and propose solutions to the problem of student absenteeism. New administrators are also assigned a mentor who is recognized as someone who is "exceptional in their job."

The district staff has structured numerous opportunities for ongoing professional development for principals and assistant principals although, according to Stream (HRD), the budget for outside professional development is not what it used to be. Monthly principal meetings have shifted away from simply transactional business to more professional development. Assistant principals are seen as contributing members of the

leadership team and participate with their principals in monthly instructional rounds. These are classroom visits that help set norms for quality teaching but, are also collaborative problem solving sessions. The evaluation process is viewed as an ongoing, coaching process that is used as a way to incrementally improve each principal's leadership skills and draw attention to ways to improve schools.

Competitive salaries and benefits is another strategy within the Riverbend Strategic Plan and Stream (HRD) mentioned that they have conducted salary studies and also passed a mill levy which is helping them make decisions in regard to salary. Finally, both Eddy and Stream expressed the desire to make the job of principal more do-able. According to Eddy, this could involve taking stuff off the principals' plates by restructuring responsibilities and redefining roles within the leadership team such as an assistant principal for climate or director of operations.

### **Common Practices among the School Districts with High Principal Retention Rates**

When examining the principal succession practices of selected Colorado school districts with high principal retention rates, similarities emerged. In Colorfield, Meadowview, and Ridgetop, professional development is provided on a variety of topics specifically designed to help the principals refine their instructional leadership skills. Additionally, leaders in all three school districts provide differentiated support for principals. Like school district leaders in Colorfield, Forrestglen, and Ridgetop, the leaders from Meadowview and Riverbend school districts also value and include stakeholder input. Leaders in each of these three school districts also described unique characteristics that they believed attributed to their success in retaining principals.

**Differentiated and individualized support.** Participants in all three districts with high principal retention rates discussed the differentiated and individualized support that the district offers and that each principal receives. Green (MP) recognized the need for individualized support for principals as it related to retention:

I think it's difficult for central office people to figure out what would we need because we're all so different and we in such different places and we've had different backgrounds and different experiences. And so, I don't think there is a one-size-fits-all something you would do. I think it really is about individualizing. We talk about differentiating for kids. Well, we better be doing the same thing for teachers and then administrators in terms of "What do they need?" Because my need with my experience is very different from a first or a second year principal.

In Colorfield, the assistant superintendent makes weekly calls to new principals to check-in. He also provides guidance and funding for each principal to partake in individualized professional development or conferences. Again, Green (MP) in Colorfield stated that she felt support was invaluable to retain principals but pondered if such an approach could become policy:

It [Support] needs to be so individualized and our current assistant sup [superintendent] is really good at working with individuals on what they need. So, I don't know if that has to become a policy. Does it need to become a policy? I don't know. Or is it more practice and part of the philosophy of the assistant sups [superintendents] working with their principals?

In Meadowview, each principal is assigned a mentor and they may also be assigned a Principal Whisperer. Each of the district administrators visits the school and the principal regularly although some of the visits are scheduled and some are more informal. Likewise, in Riverbend, Eddy (AS) coaches and visits with each of the high school principals every one to two weeks. He offers feedback, checks in on their goals, and uses a tracker form to record their progress. Eddy expressed an individualized approach when working with principals taking on a new position also, "I think a lot



depends on the needs of the individual. I mean, I think that's probably where we would start. Who are they and are they ready and what kind of support do they need?" Leaders in each of these three school districts seemed attentive and responsive of the need to provide individualized and differentiated support to help principals be successful and to retain principals.

**Value of stakeholder involvement and input.** As in the school districts with high TELL results, participants in all three districts with high principal retention identified stakeholder involvement and input as important in the principal hiring process and as key to retaining quality employees. In all three district, personnel from the Human Resources Department go to the schools and speak with a variety of stakeholders regarding the qualities needed in the next principal. Pewter (AS) in Colorfield described a process of taking easels to the school to gather information from staff. Stream (HRD) in Riverbend also expressed that they involve staff and students in the selection, no matter what level.

There is not a teachers' union in either Riverbend or Meadowview but they do have several committees that they involve in decision making. Leaders in Riverbend used stakeholder involvement extensively in their creation of a new strategic plan to guide their improvement efforts. Leaders in Meadowview use an employee input process that includes staff representatives any time there is a possible change in working conditions, salaries, or benefits. Although there is a teachers' union in Colorfield, none of the participants mentioned the union throughout their interviews.

**Unique characteristics.** Participants from these three school districts had varying opinions as to their own factors for high principal retention rates. Leaders in

Colorfield commented on the strong community support and reputation of the school district. Leaders in Riverbend, cited the area, the community, and relational trust fostered by the school district administrators being in the schools and being in partnership with the principals. Eddy (AS) explained, “We’ve made a big commitment as an organizational to relational trust and we’re working harder on that. So transparency, competency, clarity, fairness, those things that build trust.” Leaders in Meadowview mentioned the collegial relationships and ties to the community as reasons for retention. As previously mentioned, Sage (HRD) concluded that Meadowview had a unique set of factors that contributed to their higher principal retention including: a focus on internal preparation and training for current and future leaders, being an optimally-sized school district, (not too large or too small), being a smaller town situated near a larger city, and having a strong sense of how things are done here or the “Meadowview Way.” From the perspective of the participants, there were many reasons for principal retention that were distinctive to the individual school district.

### **Policies and Practices that Influence Principal Retention: Answer to Research Question #3**

The principal succession practices that these five school districts employ address two of the challenges to principal succession addressed in the literature: having enough well-qualified applicants and making the principal job do-able. To address the challenge of a well-qualified applicant pool, I discuss how these school leaders approach growing assistant principals, identify and tap future leaders, partner with universities, and use teacher leaders. To address the challenge that the principal job is becoming more undo-able and demanding, I explore how these school district leaders attempt to make the principal job more do-able by being mindful of changes, making sure the work is

engaging, providing more support for newer principals, offering competitive salaries, promoting a collaborative culture, and developing supportive relationships between principals and district office administrators. Finally, I consider other factors that participants reported as being related to retention but not necessarily a succession practice of the school district such as the location of the school district and the characteristics of the community.

### **Developing a Well-qualified Applicant Pool**

If school district leaders are committed to hiring the best, they must have available pools of well-qualified candidates. Leaders in all five school districts spoke about wanting to find well-qualified candidates that are a good fit for their school district. No one in Colorfield School District expressed any difficulties in hiring well-qualified candidates, although White (EP) noted that the number of applicants for principal positions had decreased in the last few years. Pewter (AS) revealed that he prefers to post any principal openings early and have all administrator hiring completed by April. When Pewter (AS) spoke about the two newest elementary principals to the school district, he mentioned that the first principal had 22 years of principal experience in a neighboring school district and the second one had a few years of principal experience in a metro area school district. Colorfield School District leaders also recommended Turquoise, one of the high school assistant principals, as a study participant since she was new to her role and completing the induction process. Leaders in each of the other four school districts addressed the challenge of creating a well-qualified applicant pool in a variety of ways.

In Meadowview School District which has a strong tradition of hiring principals from inside the school district, leaders have been able to fill their principal positions with internal candidates. They have addressed the challenge of well-qualified assistant principal applicants by hiring assistant principals from outside of the school district and working with universities to bring principal preparation programs into the school district. Sage (HRD) remarked that there was “a gap of who’s ready to step up to be assistant principals.” He described the state of readiness of the internal candidates in this way:

We have a very good young core group, extremely good young core group who will be extremely phenomenal administrators. They’re already in their programs.... They’re in that timeframe that they’re not quite there yet and they’ve still got to get some teaching out of their system or coaching and that sort of thing. They’re in that 6-8 year range. So they’ve already been identified, they’ve done internships, they’ve been involved. They’re just not quite there yet. So we’re running this [principal preparation] cohort to try and supplement it, if you will, until some of those guys can get going.

Sage further stated, “Just this last year, we did hire two assistant principals from outside of our district because, as we like to say, our bench was a little lean, in terms of who was interested or who completed their programs and such. We call it building our bench.”

Teachers in Meadowview also were also encouraged to begin one of two new principal preparation cohorts with two different universities during this school year.

The solution for improving the applicant pool for Ridgetop School District leaders is to recraft each principal job description based on the needs of the school and the district at the time of hiring. Ridgetop leaders also carefully follow a newly developed process for principal selection. This process involves a three-step interview of potential candidates where various stakeholders report the strengths and weaknesses of the candidates to the assistant superintendent and the superintendent. Peak (AS) stated that the candidate pool is usually decent if they had to hire only one or two principals but that

it was more challenging if they had additional openings, “So it’s been a challenge. But, generally speaking, I can usually fill two good applicant pools. Three starts getting a little skinny. I don’t want to have to do four again.”

Maple (S) reported that there are usually 15 to 20 people apply for principal openings in Forrestglen School District. Among the five school districts, leaders in Forrestglen had the most mature leadership development program in which they designed leadership opportunities and activities for teachers in preparation programs and as well as for assistant principals going through induction. Also, Oak (AS) mentioned that they looked for candidates out of principal preparation programs at certain universities that have prepared other successful principals. The principal selection process also includes an inquiry into the candidate’s willingness to be part of the community because of the importance of the fit between the community and principal.

Leaders in Riverbend have developed action steps under the goal of Talent Development in their Strategic Plan which includes ways to attract, develop, and retain leaders. Stream (HRD) mentioned that she would be conducting a market study as part of their recruiting efforts because, “We have to get people here. We have to make sure that our wages are competitive so that’s really our first step.” As the Human Resource Director, Stream had a clear sense of the principals that would be successful in Riverbend and what it would take to get them there:

I think the person that will be most successful here are those who understand an urban setting and environment because our population is about 50/50: 50 [percent] Anglo, 50 [percent] Latino. So we need somebody that understands those challenges but wants to live in this great environment. So instead of being in an inner city, it’s the same sort of environment but in a great beautiful mountainous environment. Those are kind of the people that we want to target but I don’t do a good enough job of trying to formalize our recruiting efforts and what we can do to really attract and retain and target specific people. That’s

something that I need a lot of improvement in order to help our district. I think it is a little bit by luck and a little bit my word of mouth, right now, and that's never a good strategy.

In addition to Stream's efforts through the Human Resource department, Eddy (AS) spoke about developing assistant principals to become principals and establishing a principal in training program.

### **Growth and Development of Assistant Principals**

The school districts varied in their approach and beliefs about developing assistant principals into principals. In Meadowview, all of the principals had been school district employees prior to their principal appointment and 14 of the 16 principals had been teachers in the school district and therefore people who know the programs, culture, and expectations within the school district. Sage (HRD) and other school district leaders are intentional about developing their assistant principals to become principals through the use of their Principal Whisperers who are former, retired principals assigned to work with assistant principals and principals who are struggling. In regard to developing assistant principals to be successful principals, Sage said that one of the Principal Whisperers is "assigned to every new AP and so we hope to get a hold of any of those deficiencies or needs before they actually become a principal."

Although leaders in Forrestglen design opportunities for leader development, Oak (AS) was insistent that assistant principals must earn a principal position, "They will have a good opportunity to get the job, but not necessarily given the job." Leaders in Riverbend have a recent focus on developing assistant principals through the inclusion of assistant principals in district leadership meetings and instructional rounds, in addition to administrator induction tailored to their specific needs. School district leaders in

Colorfield and Ridgetop expressed that the assistant principalship was not seen as necessarily an ascension to the principalship. In those two school districts the selection and development of assistant principals was delegated more to the principal of the building. According to Peak (AS), “The principal’s job is to coach up and train their APs [assistant principals]. We basically tell them they’ve basically have two or three years as APs and then we will start considering them for principalships. Whether they want it or not.”

### **Identifying and Tapping Future Leaders**

One of the trends in leadership development is a move toward recruiting rather than allowing leaders to self-select. Participants in this study held disparate views in regard to the role of current school district and school site leaders to grow and secure more future principals through tapping and encouraging teachers to become principals.

There seemed to be strong feelings that teachers should self-select into preparation programs and self-determine when they were ready to become principals. Boulder (MP) indicated that if people are interested in becoming an administrator, “They take it upon themselves to go to wherever they go.” Even in Meadowview School District, which had the strongest connections to universities and principal preparation cohorts, both Columbine (EP) and Sedge (MP) indicated that communication went out to all teachers explaining the program and encouraging teachers to approach their principals for more information. Neither Sedge nor Columbine necessarily recruited or tapped teacher leaders that they recognized as having leadership potential although Sedge talked about mentoring people in preparation programs or who were newly appointed administrators. Columbine said that one of her school’s teacher who is entering a cohort

is not someone that she has identified as a teacher leader in the building and that she has a hard time seeing him as a building leader but believes that the program will benefit him.

Eddy (AS) in Riverbend summed it up by saying:

Sometimes people self-identify. We have not done a good job as a district of identifying talent and encouraging people and we're just starting to create more leadership opportunities other than through a traditional track. And those are actually hard to find. But, I think we'll make some progress over time.

Individual principals had varying views on their role to develop future principals also.

For example, Boulder (MP) said "I encourage people if they are interested in it or if they come and talk to me" while Elm (HP) stated, "As a true leader, you try to push those people to what they can be great at. These two individuals that I have in my building are going to be administrators down the road and they are going to be good at it."

### **Partnerships with Preparation Programs**

Researchers have suggested that school districts and universities forge new relationships so that districts have candidates that are well-prepared to enter the role of principal (Harchar & Campbell, 2010). The school district leaders in this study held disparate views regarding the value of this type of partnership. According to Peak (AS) in Ridgetop, they have never had an early identification programs:

We kind of earmark people and just keep tabs on them. A local university has a program for teachers on educational leadership for whoever wants to do it. We encourage people to attend and participate. We try to support teachers that are working on their Type D [principal license]. And we try and support them in terms of giving them a little bit of time and space to do their internship and their observations, and play assistant principal for a while, and do all of that, serve on committees. But we haven't been real systematic about that.



In Colorfield School District, Pewter (AS) commented that having a few universities with programs accessible was beneficial but he did not mention any structured connections between the two entities.

In Riverbend, different universities have offered programs in the area. Banks (HP) has taught a class for one of the universities and the current superintendent has taught a class for another one. Stream, the Human Resources Director, stated that, when universities reach out to the district, that is extremely helpful since there is not a university in the town. However, Eddy (AS) questioned the value of many of the Colorado preparation programs calling them weak or presenting a smattering of courses rather than preparing leaders for the current demands of the principal job. When talking about one university's program, he stated:

I mean weak because it's a traditional licensure program. I don't see it as being residency-based or focused on the skills of the high leverage skills of leadership. I don't think it's standards-based or competencies-based. But that's an opportunity for those who want a license.

Eddy has clear criteria that he believes makes a strong program.

The process in Forrestglen School District is little more structured. Oak (AS) was aware of seven teachers completing their principal preparation program, and he described the interaction between the district office administrators, the principals, and the teachers in a preparation program:

Part of their program is they have to do a lot of intern things so they come to our principal meetings to meet a requirement of their coursework. They will come to a school board meeting. Then what we do with them is we put them in charge of building committees. The principal then gives them some leadership responsibility. It takes a little bit off the principal. It puts that teacher into a leadership position. And then we are able to see how they are able to handle. We do a little pre-evaluation on them. They are being evaluated the whole time on how they do. Then when we do have openings come up and those folks apply, then we have an idea of what kind of leader they are going to be.

Amongst the five districts, only Meadowview has a strong tradition of partnering with universities and offering preparation program cohorts. Sage (HRD) revealed that there are many benefits for the cohort participants and the district. The participants receive a discount on tuition, plus learn the school district's methods, philosophies, and direction. The participants are able to complete their internship within the school district's schools and are encouraged to get out of their building "to see different levels and to see different ways of doing things." Since principals are hired from the school district's current teaching and assistant principal ranks, school district leaders are able to observe the future principal candidates as they carry out various leadership responsibilities and provide support them support along the way.

### **Teacher Leader Opportunities**

One remedy to the problem of the job of principal being almost undo-able is to distribute leadership and to empower more teacher leaders (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004). Several of the school districts had a plethora of opportunities for teacher leaders, including committee chairperson, grade level or department chairperson, committee participation in district-level and building level committees, or summer school principal. However, these opportunities were seldom woven into the principal succession discussion. A few participants, such as Sage (HRD) in Meadowview, said that district-level work provided teacher leaders with some exposure to district leaders. Although each school district had lots of opportunities for teacher input and for teachers to serve as leaders, these opportunities did not appear to be part of any intentional efforts to prepare more principal candidates in the future. This is unfortunate since many of the principals perceived that their varied backgrounds and teacher leader experiences had helped them

secure their principal positions and be successful. Two of the novice elementary principals had served as instructional coaches in previous districts before landing their first principal position, and two administrators in Colorfield had been a Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA) before entering administration.

Summit (EP) was able to serve as an instructional coach, fill-in for a principal who was on maternity leave, and participate in lots of professional development in addition to her principal preparation program. She recognized that all those experiences were no substitute for actually serving as principal, saying, “Still totally different than doing it [being principal] on your own, but I felt that prepared me for this job quite a bit. I can’t imagine just going straight from classroom to that role [principal].”

Of the 11 principals, eight of them commented on their background experiences as important to their success as a principal. Banks (HP) mentioned his background in various leadership roles and in different countries. Brook (EP) believed that her experience with expeditionary learning helped secure her position. Green (MP) revealed that she had served as a camp director and coach which gave her experience in handling budgets, recruiting staff, and training staff which was extremely helpful since there was not a lot of outside support at the beginning of her principalship. Turquoise (HAP) commented that she had she learned a lot working as an assistant principal at the elementary level and as a high school teacher on special assignment. White (EP) stressed his variety of teaching experiences: “I have a good idea of what kids should be able to do and what sort of level of expectations I should see within various classrooms.” Elm (HP) credited his experience of serving as principal at the middle level and being the “new

guy” as “one of the best things that happened” to him which helped him grow in his principal skills.

Several participants mentioned the importance of having background and experience in both sides of the principalship: instructional leadership and management leadership. Sedge earned experience in the discipline side by serving as an assistant principal and on the instructional side working as an administrator in the curriculum and assessment office. Boulder (MP) indicated that he had seen some strong instructional leaders struggle with the management side of being a principal. Likewise, Peak (AS) reinforced the idea that some candidates had stronger instructional leadership skills than management skills or vice versa, “We hire instructional leaders at building where we’re confident we have good [management] systems in place. Because, otherwise, they could be great instructional leaders but they don’t get to do that because they’re playing manager all the time.” Participants indicated that different leadership several experiences inside and outside of education helped them succeed in the principalship.

### **Addressing the Do-ability Challenge**

The role of the principal has become more complex and demanding in the last few years (Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe, & Orr, 2010; Hargreaves & Fink, 2011; Tucker & Coddling, 2002). Banks (HP), who had worked in other countries, mentioned that, “The administrative role here is not seen so much as a prize as it is in other countries and not so financially well rewarded.” Likewise, Summit (EP) mentioned the challenge of “political winds” in the state of Colorado. Green (MP), a forty-year veteran in education, said, “I know I’m the odd duck, because most people are not wanting to stay this long in the profession. And it is hard and it’s gotten harder. And the hours, that I

won't miss, the 60 to 70 hour weeks." Boulder (MP) recognized that his work has changed and also worried about newer principals, "I see some of these new principals and they just, Man! They just look tired and they just look worn out. They're just spending a lot of time, it seems like, trying to catch their tail and that's tiring." Summit (EP), in that same school district, reported that she had days when she felt that the job of principal was "totally do-able" and other days when she felt that the job "was not even humanly possible."

A few principals, such as Boulder (MP), offered suggestions to help principals not feel so overwhelmed and emphasized that principals need both an instructional skill set and a management skill set. Both Pine (EP) and Green (MP) mentioned keeping master lists so, as Green put it, "we don't lose the big picture things because you can get all caught up in the tyranny of 'what's going on right now.'" Brook (EP) described the Riverbend School District leaders as looking for principal candidates that could lead change:

Certainly with our superintendent and assistant superintendent at the helm there's a push for improvement and that means it's going to [be] leaders that can push to do that, whether it be with data or with new practices, whatever it is. That they're able to lead those initiatives in a positive way.

Another suggestion made by participant principals was for school district leaders to be mindful of the number of changes, to make sure that the expectations regarding changes were reasonable, and to be sure to support principals in making those changes. Meadowview leaders seemed to heed this advice. Sage (HRD) described the Meadowview School District leaders' approach to change in this way:

I think some of it comes down to our district philosophy. We don't feel like we have to lead the pack on every new initiative that's ever out there. We're very intentional about what we put in place. But at the same time we don't feel like

we're behind. I think we're good communicators. I think we try to stay ahead of things and we're kind of optimally in the middle in a lot of ways, and I think people feel comfortable with that. They find comfort that "I'm not behind, but I don't feel like I have to be in front of everything." And so they're just comfortable and that's important.

Other actions that school district administrators took to support principals included providing flexibility in staffing and budgeting for assistant principal, dean, or other support positions as mentioned in Riverbend and Colorfield or providing more support through district office positions and departments.

Columbine (EP) also favored professional development opportunities that were tailored to the needs of principals and mindful of their available time. In Meadowview, she asserted that the school district leaders provided a principal version of the classes that many of the teachers were taking. Rather than taking the entire professional development class with the teachers, the principals received pertinent information about the main topics and what they should observe in classrooms from teachers who have taken the class. Columbine discussed professional development and work time for the principals on Mondays afterschool to get together to write their Unified Improvement Plans which is a state requirement in Colorado. She claimed Monday was a "perfect day for principals to meet after school" since there were not a lot of athletic events or activities and it did not involve more principal time away from the building during the school day. She concluded that "it's nice that they're [school district leaders are] really targeting what's going to help us [the principals]."

### **Retention Factor: Meaningful and Engaging Work**

Another strategy leaders in these school districts employ to help retain principals is to make sure that the work is engaging and meaningful. Several of the veteran

principals, such as Pine (EP) and Green (MP), emphasized that they loved the work or the job. In speaking about his long tenure as principal, Boulder (MP) concluded:

Well, it is a tough job. Well, I mean, you know, lots of people have tough jobs. You just get the right people surrounding you and you get the right support from wherever you need to get it and you just keep going on down the road....There's days of frustration obviously, but, for the most part, they're pretty good days. And you get to spend time with people you like, you get to spend time with kids, you get to do some fun, cool stuff. What more can you ask for?

Several principals revealed that although there were frustrations, they remained serving as school leaders because they enjoyed the work and co-workers. Sedge (MP) in Meadowview suggested:

So I think it's just enjoyable. It's fun. It's always been fun. Not to say there aren't moments where I'm fuming, irritated, and upset.... But, ultimately, when I go to bed at night, I know that I work with people who care about kids. And they're in it for that reason and that keeps me going. It keeps me in the game.

In addition to feeling "you make a difference," Columbine (EP) revealed, "You're appreciated" as another reason for her longevity as a school principal. Eddy (AS) argued that Riverbend School District leaders did not use retention practices per se:

I'd like to think that what keeps people in their work is job satisfaction or meaningfulness. We've made a big commitment as an organization to relational trust. And we're working harder on that. So transparency, competency, clarity, fairness, those things build trust. I wouldn't call that a practice.

School district administrators seemed mindful of the principal workload and were conscientious to not contribute to it more. Eddy (AS) in Riverbend was adamant that school district administrators must take things off the principals' plates:

Because the more we pile on them, the less satisfied their job is, the less do-able it is, the more they go home every day saying, "How am I going to get everything it done?" And so we burn them out. We don't make it a job that's do-able. And all the literature on principalship right now says it's not do-able. And so we have to ask, "What's do-able, and what's most important, and how do we make the most important the most do-able? We've got a long way to go on that....I just can't imagine any other industry expecting their leadership to do all that crap.

Eddy further described principals as the “waist of the hour glass” through which everything external or internal must pass. Possible solutions in Riverbend were making the principals’ job more do-able by not adding on so many other demands or differentiating other work roles to focus on discipline or finance or management. Pewter (AS) in Colorfield discussed that he strove for high engagement and high satisfaction with his principals. He acknowledged several ways to support the principals’ workload including offering capacity building classes through the professional development department, assigning less “minutia and hoops to jump through as other places,” asking for feedback before decisions were made, surveying the principals about the service that they were receiving from the school district administrators and departments, and providing more communication through emails to save time at principal meetings for activities with information that the principals can use immediately. He contended:

The other assistant superintendent and I are constantly talking together about making, doing things to make their [the principals’] jobs more rewarding and easier. So we look through that lens all the time, “How will the principals receive this?” “When should they hear this?” We really feel like happy principals that are well trained are going to be effective in our system and they are going to have job satisfaction.

School district leaders employed several strategies to recognize and alleviate the principals’ workload.

### **Retention Factor: More Support for New Principals**

The five school districts in this study have many formal and informal supports in place to help new principals and assistant principals. Some of the veteran administrators, such as Oak (AS) in Forrestglen, mentioned that new administrators today are getting more support and training than they ever received. Green (MP) in Colorfield laughed out



loud when asked about the support she received as a new principal 22 years ago and then replied, “That is an interesting question because there was nothing.” Pine (EP) in

Forrestglen remembered receiving his first principal position:

The superintendent came down. I was down at the middle school, and he said, “Alright, it’s your ship now.” And he left. And I asked my principal, “Does that mean that I got the job or what?” And that was pretty much it. And then I came up [to the elementary school] and just started doing what I thought I should be doing. Definitely a learning process, a learning on-the-job kind of thing.

Early in Pine’s tenure as principal, most of the support that he received from school district administrators was “moral support as opposed to anything real structured.” Pine expressed that times have changed and now the level of support the district office leaders give the principals through their meetings, trainings, and conversations is much higher than in the past.

Boulder (MP), a veteran principal in Ridgetop School District, remarked that there were not a lot of formal staff development opportunities when he became an assistant principal. Boulder asserted that new assistant principals were left to “figure it out” and “If you were lucky, you had a principal who kind of guides you and helps you and mentors you.” In contrast, Boulder has noticed a recent, deliberate attempt by the central office administrators to provide support and training in areas where new administrators need support and move away from the “sink or swim model.” He added that “a more thoughtful, reflective approach” was an attempt to retain principals stating that in the past, “Principals would just come and go. And, if they stayed, great. And if they left, we’d just find somebody else.” Ridgetop School District has had several turnovers amongst its elementary principals in the last few years and Summit (EP) who is only in her third year as a principal mentioned that that on-boarding for principals and

teachers is a new concept this year which she is hopeful will help stabilize the elementary principal ranks.

### **Retention Factor: Salary**

To gain improvements in salary or other working conditions have been shown as an impetus for principal moves to other school districts (Baker, Punswick, & Belt, 2010). However, participants in this study did not regard increasing principal salaries as a strong strategy for principal retention but that providing competitive salaries may help. In Riverbend, the school district leaders completed a market study and overhauled their administrative salary schedule about four years ago which Stream (HRD) said helped to attract better candidates. Stream mentioned that the leaders in Riverbend were also formalizing their action steps to accompany their talent development goal of their strategic plan:

The first step in this strategic plan under talent development is to do a market study. So that is what we are doing now because again we have to get people here. We have to make sure that our wages are competitive. So that's really our first step.

Eddy (AS) in Riverbend regarded competitive salaries as a piece of a retention strategy:

We're not committed to getting people rich, but we're competitive and committed to having highly competitive salaries in the marketplace and, honestly, if somebody gets a 5% pay raise, it's probably not going to be a determinant. But, if they know that the district is committed in the market place to giving them at least market salaries or better, I think that goes a lot toward saying, "This is an organization [in which] I want to be a member. So, that's a strategy I would say relates to retention.

Administrators from other school districts mentioned that salaries for principals were competitive but usually not the top salaries in the area. Oak (AS) said that the principals in Forrestglen have a quality schedule that supports families, and yet every spring the principals mention that the salaries for principals in a neighboring district are higher.

However, he added, “I don’t see them [the principals] wanting to leave.” A few principals knew that their salary might increase some if they moved to one of the large school districts in the Denver Metro area but they seemed unwilling to do so just for a salary increase. Boulder (MP), a veteran principal in Ridgetop, quipped, “I never can find a compelling reason to do it [change school districts], other than if I went to Metro School District A or Metro School District B or one of those. My salary would increase whatever increase.” Sage (HRD) assessed that the other benefits of working in Meadowview may outweigh the benefit of more money, “You may get paid a thousand more there but you’ve got all kinds of different issues you’ve got to face.” Likewise, Oak (AS) promoted staying in Forrestglen if a principal wanted “quality of life. And if you want the bigger bucks, go to School District X or School District Y.” Oak also expressed that another benefit of working in Forrestglen as a principal was the freedom to make decisions without worrying about a teachers’ union.

### **Retention Factor: Collaborative Culture**

Without exception, every one of the 11 principal participants contended that fellow principal colleagues in the school district were a valuable, informal support, even though principals admitted that there were times that schools competed against each other for student assessment scores or in athletic contests. Sedge (MP) from Meadowview acknowledged:

We need to do well together. If we are all figuring it out, I want to share what’s working for me and I hope they share what’s working for them. I think, the administrators at the admin [administration] building push that agenda more. They’re just always, “Let’s not compete. We can compete within reason.” But, “Let’s work together and collaborate.” It’s more of the intense focus.

Although there are four distinct communities and several schools in Forrestglen, Elm (HP) stated that “the district has done a pretty good job of trying us one district instead of many schools within the district.” Participants described their relationships with other principals in the school district using the following terms: “collegiate atmosphere,” “mutually supportive,” “pretty close group of colleagues,” “a family,” and “a tight group.” Principals engaged in several activities which they viewed as supportive. Several of them mentioned that they frequently call other principals, especially those at their same level, to get ideas about how to do something, problem-solve, get advice on an issue, ask questions, or, simply, “bounce ideas off of each other.” Pine (EP) described the mutual support:

We call each other and touch bases frequently. From things like, “Hey, heads up, we have this thing coming up” or those kinds of things or “Can I take a look at your Unified Improvement Plan?” or just even with our board presentation. Someone might say, “Can I take a look at that?” Or that kind of thing.

Additionally, colleagues were seen as supports when times were tough. Sedge (MP) mentioned everyone pulling together to take care of a principal colleague who lost her house in a fire. Checking in, especially with newer principals, was seen as beneficial for retention because as Sedge (MP) stated, “So I think the formal part is nice but the informal is a lot of times where the rubber really meets the road and you get the opportunity to hear from different people and their perspectives on things.” Turquoise (HAP) confirmed this feeling:

So I frequently email other coordinators. I still email my elementary principals and just say, ‘Hey, what do you think?’ So I think it’s an informal network that I think encourages you to stay afloat and keep going, to stay in the job.

Support was not just a one-way street from veteran principals to new principals though.

Summit (EP) described how the group of elementary principals supported each other:

One of them has like 25 years as a principal, so he's a good go-to when you need a calm voice and mentoring kind of a thing; for some of those nuts and bolts. And at the same time he came to us who had been training as coaches for more of the instructional leadership piece.

White (EP) mentioned that meeting together regularly was supportive and Green (MP) claimed that work on the various projects such as report cards or the evaluation system had brought principals together more. In one of the school districts with high principal retention rates, Brook (EP) explained that there are some good partnerships between principal and assistant principal and stability in some of the administrative teams at schools, which may contribute to the retention of site administrators. Banks (HP) commented on the culture of Riverbend School District supporting retention:

I think the culture of the school district is to have a team of people who are mutually supportive, work together, work really quite closely together....I think people are minded to remain in a position where they feel that they are engaged, where they feel that what they do is meaningful and where there is a feeling of being part of a team. And part is a function of size and part is a function of the personalities and part is a function of the direction given by the district office.

School district leaders also noticed and encouraged the close, collaborative relationships between principals. Oak (AS) who had been a principal in Forrest Glen noted that there was a tight bond amongst the principals:

If you get to a board meeting and get a public comment or two that is zinging a principal or a building, next thing you know you'll have a colleague or two call you saying: "Hey, hang in there. That parent is out of line. Just stay the course." "Hey, thanks for the phone call." You feel that internal support and you are willing to fight the fight.

Pewter (AS) described the close relationships among the elementary principals in Colorfield as a factor in retaining principals:

I don't care how corny it sounds, they are family. So when you are brought into that family, they look out for you, they have lunch together, they share your pain, they know about your kids....I can tell you that if you asked any of those six

people that have been hired in the last two years, what is the best part of working in Colorfield, they would say “My colleagues: they are there for me, they call me, they send me things, they will call.” I will hear a couple of them say, “You know, I am down and it’s just been a tough day and for whatever reason, So-and-so just knew to call me that day.” I don’t think that is accidental, I think that is intentional. I think our people really look out for each other and share and all that. I think that has a lot to do with retention.

Eddy (AS) developed the idea of formal structures leading to more informal support adding, “I think we do our best to foster that kind of relationship building.”

Collaboration with colleagues was perceived as helpful and a factor in retention.

### **Retention Factor: Supportive Relationships With Supervisors and School District Administrators**

In addition to collegial relationships among the principals themselves, supportive relationships between the principals and their supervisors and/or other school district administrators were cited by leaders in every school district as a factor for principal retention. This supportive relationship was characterized by four features: accessibility to school district leaders and experts, visibility of school district administrators in the buildings, feelings of support and safety, and an evaluation process that supports growth.

**Accessibility.** School district leaders in each of the five school districts expressed intentional efforts to be available and accessible to the principals. Pewter (AS) from Colorfield said it started as soon as he hired a new principal and continued for the first couple of years. He described his system for remembering to contact the newer principals regularly:

Now what I do is I check-in with Principal 1 and Principal 2 once a week. I will have a note in my car, a post-it that is in my car that says “Principal 1” and “Principal 2” and it’s my tickler to know that I contact them, even it is just a text [message]: “Do you need anything?” “How are you?” “Happy birthday!” “I heard

a good thing about you.” It’s very much a positive approach with them and they are doing so well.

Several of the school district leaders mentioned being accessible and available to the principals “24/7” meaning 24 hours per day and seven days per week. For example, Sage (HRD) in Meadowview said, “You can call any central administrator 24/7 at any time and get what you need.” The intentional efforts on the part of the central office administrators to be available and accessible were noticed by the principal participants. Sedge (MP) in Meadowview affirmed what Sage said to be true remarking:

You can also call anybody above you...They [the central office administrators] encourage it. They’re like, “Hey, if you’re not sure, just call. You know we don’t mind.” And they don’t. They’ll answer the phone or text [message] any time you need them so it’s very, very nice.

Likewise, Columbine (EP), who has been a principal in Meadowview for 10 years, appreciated the support:

I mean this is a family. It’s a small district so it’s...I feel like everything is just a support. You can ask any question. You call up there and you will get somebody that will, it may not be the person you intended, but you will get someone and they will get an answer to you. So I think that it’s just, it’s small enough that the support’s there because you never, you never feel as if you are alone.

In Ridgetop, school district leaders commented that they are available 24 hours per day and seven days per week while the principals mentioned that the central office administrators are very responsive to any questions or needs that the principals have.

**Visibility.** Central office administrators are also in the buildings several times per week in all of the selected school districts. In Ridgetop School District, Peak (AS) mentioned that the superintendent had an expectation that the seven members of the District Office Cabinet would be in the schools a minimum of eight hours per week. In Riverbend School District, Stream (HRD) depicted a change in the amount of time that

school district leaders spend in the schools, “I think the Superintendent and the Chief Academic Officer spend more time in schools now than I’ve ever seen anybody do and that makes a huge difference.” Sage (HRD) in Meadowview articulated that the central office administrators including administrators from the finance, technology, facilities, and special education departments have both regularly scheduled meetings with the principals in the schools and conduct informal visits to the schools often: “If there’s a day where all the central administrators are in the central ad [ministration] office, that’s pretty rare.” Maple (S) in Forrestglen explained that she and the assistant superintendents are “constantly in buildings.” This time spent in the buildings can put a strain on the school district leaders because “there is all this other paperwork that you have to do” according to Maple (S), but it is important to guide and support the principals.

Oak (AS) in Forrestglen echoed Maple’s (S) sentiment adding that the central office administrators are even more visible and attend more meetings in the school when difficult times occur because “We [the district office administrators] don’t want them [the principals] to feel isolated because if any one of our principals is in the hot seat, we consider ourselves in that [the hot seat] as well.” Several of the principals commented that they feel supported by the school district office leaders, especially when critical issues come up. Brook (EP) in Riverbend said, “The whole leadership team makes me feel like I’m their focus, like ‘Ok, we can help Brook be successful.’ So I think they get it.” This support from the school district office leaders can help the principals not feel that they are alone when issues arise.

Principal participants in all five school districts noticed and appreciated the visits from central office administrators. Sometimes these visits are scheduled and part of a



formal visit or process. Other times, the directors come to the school just “to see how things are going” or “to check on me.” Columbine (EP) from Meadowview described the personalized nature of the visits from her direct supervisor in the following manner:

My direct supervisor comes in here and she spends the day. So that sometimes looks like she comes in here: we look at data, we go visit classrooms, we have conversations, and sometimes [she says] ‘I just need to check on you. You’ve had just a slew of parents in... You’ve had a situation.’ We had a death last year, and that takes over.

The frequency of visits seems to help develop the relationships and principals indicated that these visits helped the central office administrators understand the context of their school. Sage (HRD) in Meadowview School District mentioned that the superintendent has lunch with every principal once per month to maintain a connection and communication with each one.

**Safety and support.** Accessibility to school district leaders is often coupled with feelings of support. Both newer and more veteran principals in each school district conveyed that the school district leaders were supportive. Boulder (MP) in Ridgetop School District understands that the school district administrators are busy but indicated that they are “certainly available if you have an issue and you need to talk to them about it. And, I don’t ever feel unsupported by them.” Three of them said that they knew that the central office administrators “have my back.”

Another important aspect of supportive relationships is safety to ask questions or ask for help because “there’s got to be a safe way to express frustrations or ask for help” according to one of the newer principals. Some of the principals felt safe with their supervisor or with school district office administrators such as Sedge (MP) who stated, “We’re [the principals are] not afraid of our supervisors and our supervisors aren’t afraid

to have tough conversations if they need to with us. But we do it out of relationship.” In other cases, the new principal’s mentor can be the go-to person for different ideas without “fear of having to go to someone at the district level” or go to someone who serves as an evaluator.

All of this internal support and accessibility lends itself to better relationships between the principals and the school district leaders which many participants reported as a factor for retention. Stream (HRD) in Riverbend expressed:

What keeps people here is their relationship with their supervisors and with their team. So we have really tried hard to improve that...They [the Superintendent and the Chief Academic Officer] can get out and be seen and really work a little bit more in partnership with principals rather than the top-down approach. So I think people stay because of those relationships.

When there are strong, professional relationships between principals and supervisors, retention is aided. Sedge (MP) in Meadowview which has a high principal retention rate articulated the type of relationship between administrators which he feels advances retention:

I think it comes back down to that relationship piece. We like to be around each other. We enjoy [each other]. We’re friends and we can mess up and challenge each other and push each other to grow and speak our minds without taking offense with someone.

Once these relationships are established, it is possible to have difficult conversations and for principals to grow through these conversations. In Riverbend School District, Banks (HP), who is an incredibly experienced principal, explained that Eddy (AS) “explicitly challenges and supports.” Additionally, if clear expectations are part of the relationships, as in in the case in Forrestglen School District, then it is easier for the supervisor to call the principals on any breaches of expectations.

**Evaluation process that supports growth.** In 2010, the Colorado state legislature passed a bill, which regulated the evaluation system for teachers and principals and tied final educator evaluation ratings to student assessment results beginning in the 2013-14 school year (Colorado Department of Education [CDE], 2014). The State of Colorado allows school districts to develop and use their own principal, teacher, and specialized service professional evaluation systems if they ensure that all of the components required by law are included and technical regulations are met (CDE, 2014). Most of the school districts in this study were in their second year of implementing the state model evaluation system except for Colorfield in which school district leaders had designed and used an evaluation system unique to the school district. The implementation of this evaluation system has impacted the ways that principals are evaluated according to the participants of this study. In each school district, leaders mentioned that their evaluation process has become more systematized and structured. It is imperative that principals meet with their supervisors for a goal-setting conference, a midyear conference, and an end of year conference. While school district leaders recognized that more structured evaluation system is beneficial, the real benefit is from coaching and developing principals.

Veteran principals, such as Pine (EP) from Forrestglen, Green (MP) from Colorfield, and Boulder (MP) from Ridgetop, felt that the process was good because it gives veteran principals “some clear places to focus on for the year” and “a road map to follow.” The evaluation also has a rubric with clearly defined standards, elements and actions which Pine said “feels less subjective...as opposed to a narrative” that was used in the past.

There was a general consensus that the power of the evaluation process to shape principal actions and effectiveness is in the conversations or in the coaching. In Forrestglen School District, Maple (S) recognized that “this evaluation [system] takes a lot of time but I think it is very good. It is a good way to set up the conversations.” In Riverbend, Stream (HRD) concurred stating that “the evaluation tool itself, the rubric lends to a little bit richer and deeper conversation so I think that is probably a little bit more helpful.” Banks (HP) mentioned that although he had formal sit-down meetings with Eddy (AS) regarding his evaluation, the process did not feel like compliance: “the tone [of those meetings] is not one of policing, the tone is one of professional development.” This comment matches Eddy’s stated opinion that “our current emphasis on evaluation is way disproportionate to its value” and Eddy’s emphasis on coaching the principals.

In some instances frequent school site visits were associated with more feedback and coaching. Eddy (AS) from Riverbend School District, who works frequently with the secondary principals in the school district, explained that he meets with every principal he supervises either weekly or semi-weekly and described his coaching as “more formative, more regular and frequent, more specific, more actionable, [and] more goal-orientated.” He is systematic in the ways that he continues to follow up with the principals:

Then they [the principals] have this little tracker in a spreadsheet where we check in on the goals. We check in on what’s their greatest celebration this week, what’s their greatest challenge, how did they do on their planning? We always end with action steps and we check in on how those action steps go and [ask] now what? And what I try to push them to do is to problem solve and then commit to action steps based on the best solutions they can think of. And then [I] check-in on them a week or two later and say, “So, how’d that go?” [I] keep it really focused around observable evidence and data.

In some instances, a few newer principals wished for more frequent feedback and more structured time with other administrators. One newer administrator lamented, “Sometimes I’m like ‘Hey do I need to have an emergency in order for someone to pay attention to me?’ And I know that they are super swamped and busy too.”

### **The Role of the Community In Principal Retention**

When asked about retention factors, many of the participants mentioned the community and its surrounding area as a reason for staying more than any policies or practices that the school district leaders used. Columbine (EP) responded that she was unaware of anything that the school district personnel did strategically to retain principals and another principal said, “For me, it’s not really practices within the district. The community is so...I mean our families are so wonderful....They’re supportive and they’re kind.”

Participants in several school districts eluded to the geographic location as one of the main reasons for staying in a school district. When talking about their community and the beauty of Colorado participants said, “We’re spoiled with where we live,” “If you want to hunt and fish and mountain bike, you’re in heaven,” “This is a great place to live,” “It’s beautiful,” “We live in a great place,” “We live in an area of spectacular natural beauty,” and “I think a lot of it has to do with this lovely valley.”

Participants also recognized that, once educators and their families got settled in a community, it was hard to leave. Stream (HRD) from Riverbend said, “Once people make the decision to move a family here, usually we have them.” Several participants discussed raising a family in the community. Summit (EP) in Ridgetop declared, “Once a

family gets here and gets settled, it's a lot harder to move with kids and things." These sentiments were reiterated by Elm (HP) from Forrestglen, "Once you buy a place in our town and become a teacher here and an administrator and a principal, it's hard to leave because your friends have families and you become friends with those families and you kind of grow into one big family."

Characteristics of the community were another reason for retention. Turquoise (HAP) commented about the main city in the Colorfield School District: "It's a good community. We have a lot of good things here and for the most part the community is supportive of educators." Green (MP) cited many positive features of the community as well: "district has a great reputation," "great kids that care about learning," "supportive parents," and "mostly great teachers" in addition to the benefit of having a university in town. In addition, Pewter (AS) talked about good parent, community, and university support adding "Our community right smack dab in the middle of a recession approved a mill [levy] and a bond."

Columbine (EP) and Sedge (MP) from Meadowview both mentioned a "community feel," Likewise, Sage discussed the numerous Meadowview graduates that are employed by the school district, "First of all, about a quarter to a third of our staff every year are Meadowview grads. There's a lot of people who are staying in Meadowview. They grew up here, they graduated from here, and their connections are here." No matter which school district participants worked for, they each attributed some aspect of their community to the retention of school leaders.

## **Conclusion**

Through this chapter, I have described the findings from the investigation of five Colorado school districts which were selected as possible rich cases for the study of principal succession practices. I have identified many common practices from these districts including stakeholder input and differentiated support for principals. I have also identified the approaches to the principal succession regarding issues of well-qualified applicants and the do-ability of the position of principal in these school districts. I have also discussed the role of the community in retention decision as perceived by the participants in this study. In Chapter V, I discuss the implications of these findings and recommendations for educational leaders.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Principals are important to schools and to school improvement (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). Therefore, supporting the development of current and future principals is critical to ongoing efforts to improve schools and ensure all students achieve at high levels. State, school district, and school leaders are responding to the issues of principal workforce trends in a variety of ways, yet, there has been little attention given to succession planning within schools although it offers a long-term view of leadership development and sustainability (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003, 2006; Mascall, Monroe, Jantzi, Walker, & Sacks, 2011; Rothwell, 2010). Succession planning is an under-developed and under-practiced strategy that can help school district leaders meet their present and future leadership needs (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011). Succession planning is defined as a “systematic, long-term approach to meeting the present and future talent needs of an organization to continue to achieve its mission and meet or exceed its business objectives” (Rothwell, Jackson, Knight, & Lindholm, 2005, p. 27). Succession planning includes the adoption of specific procedures to assure the identification, development, strategic application, and long-term retention of talented individuals (Rothwell, 2010). Prior research on principal succession is limited (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009) and, in many cases, has focused on only one component of succession such as preparing or inducting leaders. Given the principal workforce trends and the lack



of succession practices used in schools, this study was timely and necessary to inform school district leaders regarding actions and considerations that could enhance the success and, ultimately, the retention of principals.

In this qualitative case study, I explored the policies and practices regarding principal succession in Colorado school districts with more positive working conditions as reported by the Colorado Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning Survey (TELL) Survey and/or higher principal retention rates to further understand the extent to which school districts are using succession practices to meet their leadership needs. Through semi-structured interviews with school district leaders responsible for hiring and supervising principals and with school principals, I was able to capture practices and perceptions regarding principal succession and principal retention in order to illuminate possible succession practices that might be useful to other leaders interested in developing and retaining school leaders. I constructed a description of the principal succession practices drawn from the experiences of principals and administrators for each selected school district and also analyzed the data for emergent themes.

In this chapter, I discuss the implications of research findings of this study related to the research questions. These findings have implications for educational leaders, including school district administrators, school principals, and others, interested in strengthening principal succession practices and retaining school principals. In addition, I identify limitations and offer recommendations for future research. Finally, I explore how this study has affected my personal views on the principalship and on succession practices.

### **Discussion of Findings**

It was hoped that the purposeful selection of individual participants and sites would yield information-rich cases to illuminate the research questions of the study (Patton, 2002). Although the sampling techniques I employed for this study focused on two potential sources of information-rich cases for the exploration of practices that support principal succession, high TELL survey results and high principal retention rates, most of the findings cross both groups of schools districts. In regard to retention practices, school district leaders and their practices contributed to the themes regardless of how their school district was selected for participation. The sampling techniques produced five school districts, which proved to be information-rich cases that yielded many themes that are supported by the literature on principal succession. A few additional themes should be considered when developing a succession plan.

Leaders in these school districts leveraged components of a succession system such as hiring practices, induction, mentoring, and transition support to help develop and retain leaders. The succession practices that leaders in these school districts identified also addressed two main challenges: 1) developing a well-qualified cadre of potential principals and 2) supporting and retaining principals. To address the challenge of developing a pool of well-qualified potential principal candidates, school district and school leaders employed several approaches including developing assistant principals, tapping future leaders, partnering with preparation programs, and providing teacher leader opportunities. To address the challenge of retaining principals given the demands of the position, leaders responded in several ways including being mindful of the workload, providing differentiated support, paying attention to working conditions such

as salary and community support, fostering a collaborative culture among principals, and building and maintaining supportive relationships between principals and school district administrators. It should be noted that while these approaches and responses emerged as themes, there was wide variation in the practices and the explicitness of the efforts of leaders across the school districts and even within a single school district.

**Lessons Learned from School Districts  
with High Colorado Teaching,  
Empowering, Leading, and  
Learning Survey Results**

The TELL survey is designed to measure the working conditions of educators that have been empirically linked to teacher retention and student learning (New Teacher Center [NTC], 2013f). In analyzing the data from the school districts with high TELL results, there are several lessons to be gained. Leaders in these school districts used similar practices for the inclusion of stakeholders in the selection process, ongoing professional development for leaders, and transition planning, which will be discussed later in this chapter. Additionally, positive and supportive relationships between principals and teachers existed in the school districts with high TELL survey results. Specifically, four aspects of the teacher-principal relationship were noted. In these school districts, teachers' input was valued and acted upon, teachers were trusted and treated as professionals, principals genuinely cared about their staff and students, and principals were viewed as leaders that teachers follow. This finding aligns with recommendations from the NTC when interpreting TELL results. NTC (2013) concluded that in order for principals to influence teacher retention and student learning through their leadership, leaders need to have the skills and capacity to build strong school cultures, positive trusting school climates, and supportive conditions for teaching and

learning. These leader characteristics were also associated with teachers having positive views of administration, which were predictive of teacher decisions to stay (Boyd et al., 2011). This finding seems to indicate that school districts leaders would be prudent to select leaders with skills in collaboration and to continue to train their current leaders in structures that assist in collaboration such as professional learning communities and teaming.

### **Lessons Learned from School Districts with High Principal Retention Rates**

When examining the practices of the school districts with high principal retention rates there were less similarities across school districts. Rather, leaders in each school district expressed a combination of actions and attitudes that they believed contributed to their ability to retain principals. Sage (HRD) explained that the leaders in the Meadowview school district had a unique set of practices and factors that came together to create a culture that supported the development and retention of leaders. Strong relationships with the community and with other members of the school district organization were a hallmark of these districts.

### **Leveraging Current Practices**

There are several practices that school district leaders in these school districts used that are supported by the literature related to hiring, inducting, mentoring, developing current leaders, and transitioning leaders. Before hiring a principal for a school, central office administrators in all five school districts solicited input from members of the school community. School district leaders have developed processes for collecting input from staff members prior to posting positions or prior to interviewing candidates. School district leaders also included stakeholders in the selection process as

members of interview committees and invite members to provide their observations regarding each candidate's strengths and weaknesses. The inclusion of school staff in the selection process was perceived as a key strategy to help the new principal assimilate and transition into the role. This involvement of school staff resulted in the familiarity of some staff members with the new principal and these staff members giving the new principal their initial support. Macmillan, Meyer, Northfield, and Foley (2011) found that hiring practices that served the needs of the district rather than the individual schools hindered implementation of district initiatives and trust in the new principal, which lead to a lack of commitment to the new principal and the new direction. By involving stakeholders in the selection of the principal, leaders in these school districts were committed to hiring a principal that could meet the needs of the school district and the needs of the school community. This tactic served these school districts with higher principal retention rates and/or higher TELL survey results well.

Through shaping experiences and structures, school district leaders are able to influence the organizational socialization of principals and enhance desired outcomes (Hart, 1993). Socialization can help retain newcomers if leaders are attentive to the interactions that newcomers have with each other and with experienced organizational members (Allen, 2006). Induction practices in these school districts are supported by the literature. Leaders in these school districts used orientation events and induction programs to help new administrators become familiar with the processes, people, culture, and positions within the district. These events were seen as ways to begin to inculcate the new principals in the ways of the district and provide organizational socialization. Induction is a practice that can be leveraged to provide benefits for the novice

administrator as well as the school district. Through induction school district leaders not only can help develop possible principal candidates, but also school district leaders can discover strengths of assistant principals and begin to form a supportive relationship with these novice leaders that this study indicated are critical to the retention of principals. These events also served to introduce high-ranking school district leaders to novice and developing leaders. In Forrestglen, Ridgetop, Meadowview, and Riverbend school districts, the assistant superintendents were the organizers and often the instructors for the induction sessions.

Coaching and mentoring supports new principals (James-Ward, 2013). In addition, the best mentors for aspiring and novice school leaders are mature current and retired principals (Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe, & Orr, 2010; Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011). School district leaders in this study capitalized on the use of coaching and mentoring through various means including the Principal Whisperers in Meadowview, the coaching that principals received from Eddy (AS) in Riverbend, mentoring through induction in Forrestglen, and working with retired and/or current master principals in Colorfield. Novice principals in this study appreciated the support that their mentors and supervisors provided. Novice principals relied on these people to get questions answered and for advice on issues that they were facing. Often times these people were still viewed as mentors and invaluable supports long after the formal mentoring relationship was over. Additionally, the supportive relationships between the principals and their supervisors can be viewed as mentoring or coaching relationships since principals were encouraged to call with questions or to get advice. Additionally,

supervisors visited schools to check-in with principals and often provided support and guidance during these visits.

Similarly, Kearney (2010) indicated that training and serving as a coach or mentor may motivate principals to stay on the job. The veteran principals and administrators in this study often expressed satisfaction in mentoring new leaders. Veteran principals such as Green (MP), and Pine (EP) had developed checklists and systems to make sure that their assistant principals were exposed to all aspects of the principalship. Mentoring may also be a way for organizations to preserve outgoing knowledge and enhance the transfer of insider knowledge (White, Cooper, & Brayman, 2006), which can be helpful since leadership changes can be disruptive to schools. Both Sage (HRD) and Oak (AS) expressed a desire for assistant principals to experience or learn about all aspects of the principalship as part of their induction and early training, and in preparation for the assistant principals to eventually serve as principals.

School district leaders can improve the overall quality of succession processes through purposeful attention to many aspects of succession including professional development and evaluation (Hart, 1993). School district leaders in this study utilized professional development provided within the school district as a way to foster growth and sustain leaders. Both school district leaders and principals indicated a move away from principal meetings focused on disseminating information toward more professional development opportunities focused on instructional issues and building principals' capacity. This trend mirrors the trend found in six school districts working with the Principal Pipeline Initiative (Turnbull, Riley, Arcaira, Anderson, & MacFarlane, 2013). In this study, these professional development opportunities were varied and included

leadership training, training on instructional issues, learning teams focused on a specific topic or area of instructional leadership, and instructional rounds or walkthrough observations. While these activities were abundant, school district leaders could further enhance them by ensuring that professional development opportunities are linked, ongoing, and embody systematic professional renewal (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Zellner, Ward et al., 2002).

The supervision and evaluation process was seen as valuable to the participants in this study. School district administrators in all five school districts commented that, with the newly adopted principal standards created by the Colorado Educator Effectiveness Act of 2010, principal evaluation has been a recent focus for professional learning. Administrators also indicated that they spent considerable with each of the principals that they supervised for purposes of professional growth and supervision, thus indicating a shift from serving as managers of principals to developers of principals (Turnbull et al., 2013). Principals, such as Banks (HP), articulated that the current supervision and evaluation process used by the leaders in his school district challenged him and supported his growth as a leader. As indicated in this study, professional development and evaluation can be a powerful aids in the development of principals which may assist in retention.

Transition is important for new leaders to demonstrate their competency and begin to build their credibility with the staff (Hart, 1993). Meyer, Macmillan, and Northfield (2009) also observed that careful attention to specific practices by the successor principal and school district minimized the negative effects of succession on the school culture and helped boost teacher morale, which was critically important during



and after a principal succession event. Although leaders in the different school districts approached transition differently, all were careful to engineer the entry of the new principal to hopefully launch a successful tenure. The school district leaders employed several strategies including providing school district information on processes and procedures, including the new principal in school district and school level meetings and in making decisions for the next school year, allowing the new principal to hire any new staff, having the new principal meet with the outgoing principal, and encouraging the new principal to meet with staff and school community members.

Hart (1993) concluded that a new principal should spend time understanding the individual beliefs, values, skills, and expectations of the staff, synthesize these into patterns for valuable insight into the existing culture, and use these insights and past experiences to inform choices to move toward new goals. Additionally, Mascall and Leithwood (2010) recommended that school district leaders encourage incoming principals to understand and respect the school improvement efforts that were already underway, unless the school is in need of turnaround. While all leaders had approaches that hinted at these ideas, the Forrestglen leaders used two specific strategies that align with this literature regarding a successful transition: the listening tour where the new principal listened to the needs of the staff and the development of an entry plan in conjunction with the school district office administrators. This plan defined goals and expectations for the new principal based on the past and current realities of the school and also included dreams and visions for the future of the school.

### **Growing Future Leaders**

Myung, Loeb, and Horng (2011) recognized the influence that principals can have when they tap future leaders. Myung et al. found that many principals were likely to tap teachers who demonstrated leadership capacities and had experiences to be effective leaders and that tapping had a significant impact on a teacher's interest in school leadership. Participants, especially principals in this study, achieved satisfaction and felt a sense of responsibility to mentor novice principals and assistant principals. Once teachers were in preparation programs or secured an assistant principal or principal position, principals and other leaders provided numerous experiences and supports to help them grow and develop. Unfortunately, participants still often relied on self-identification of leaders for entrance into leadership preparation programs or into teacher leader roles. This is one difference between public sector and private sector succession practices, which is a risky proposition that can hurt leadership development efforts (Bush, 2012; Hartle & Thomas, 2006). Principals and school district leaders were underutilizing the power of tapping that could help develop future leaders.

Likewise, several school district leaders offered opportunities for teacher leaders to be involved in decision-making, participate in committees, and lead professional development. However, there seemed to be a disconnection between teacher leadership and tapping these teachers as possible future principals. Although principals recognized that a variety of opportunities that they had as teacher leaders had prepared them and given them a strong foundation for their success in the principalship, they often failed to connect the teacher leader opportunities in their school district with the preparation of future school principals. Myung et al. (2011) encouraged school district leaders to

support tapping based on leadership competencies by explicitly defining those competencies and training principals to tap individuals with those characteristics. Participants in each school district identified leadership characteristics that they believed were valued in their school district. As previously noted, leaders in Riverbend defined six leadership dispositions to help hire and develop future leaders. They expected leaders to be engaging by creating an excitement for learning, adaptable, a learner with a continuous improvement mindset, collaborative and value teamwork, caring by putting students first, and accountable for student results. The Riverbend leaders were also focused on growing other leaders: Eddy through his support of principals and inductees, Banks (HP) through his involvement with preparation programs, and Brook (EP) with her insistence of involving and empowering leaders in her building.

Schmidt-Davis and Bottoms (2011) recognized that the principal's job in developing future leaders is under-developed and that the current systems actually discourage principals from investing their time in succession planning and growing future leaders. Schmidt-Davis and Bottoms argued that while principal evaluation tools focus on helping teachers be more effective and on current results of teachers and test scores, principals put "themselves on the line when they release their best teachers from the classroom for opportunities to develop as future leaders" (p. 39). In this study, principals did not seem to want to hold teachers back or prevent them from becoming principals, rather, some principals seemed to lack awareness that they needed to tap future leaders and some principals expected teachers to self-select. Schmidt-Davis and Bottoms (2011) further recommended that school districts and states reward principals for their efforts to develop new school leaders by making this responsibility part of licensure and

performance pay systems and recognizing principals who serve as mentors and role models. Although the principal evaluation instrument in the state of Colorado encourages principals to help teachers grow in their instructional skills and be involved in leadership activities at the building level, it does not address the responsibility of principals to cultivate future principals or be involved in succession planning (CDE, 2014). In this study, growing future leaders seemed more ingrained in the culture in Forrestglen with its strong programs for developing assistant principals and in Meadowview with its tradition of growing and promoting internal candidates.

One avenue to increasing the quality and quantity of leaders is through better principal preparation programs (Olson, 2008; Mitgang, Gill, & Cummins, 2013). However, critics have claimed that many preparation programs inadequately prepare candidates for the current realities of the position and misaligned with the needs of school districts (Bottoms & O'Neill, 2001; Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Levine, 2005; Mitgang et al., 2013). School principals and school district leaders in this study had varying views on the usefulness of preparation programs and partnerships with universities to supply their leadership needs. Meadowview leaders focused on growing internal leaders and have regularly offered preparation programs in partnerships with universities. Through their partnerships, Meadowview leaders were able to shape program offerings, shape the content of programs, and design learning experiences, which helped the teachers in the preparation programs affiliate with the school district and its practices. Consequently, they were able to fill most of their principal vacancies with internal candidates that they feel are well-versed in their school district systems and culture. This practice supports that partnerships between school districts and universities

can develop a stronger and more committed leadership pool that meets the needs of the school district and provide candidates with relevant and consistent support as they enter administration (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010)

In looking at exemplary preparation programs, Darling-Hammond et al. (2010) found that principals who were prepared in exemplary programs developed many skills associated with school success, reported feeling more prepared to lead collaborative learning organizations and instructional improvement, and were more committed and likely to stay in the job as principal. Most leaders in other school districts expressed appreciation for the university programs in their area but have not forged strong relationships or ongoing partnerships with these universities to help them meet their future leadership needs. Doing so could help them capitalize on developing leaders with the competencies that they are seeking in successful principal candidates and improve retention.

### **Lack of Awareness of Succession Practices**

Succession planning for school leaders has been described as a virtuous cycle that includes talent identification, talent development, selection, onboarding and support, evaluation and process improvement, and the development of future leaders (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011). Additionally, there is wide agreement that succession planning is an underused strategy for retaining leaders and ensuring sustainability of school improvement efforts in schools (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003; Mascall et al., 2011) although school leaders may practice some aspects of succession planning (Brundrett, Rhodes, & Gkolia, 2006). In this study, although these five school districts were successful in many aspects, none of them had fully developed succession planning processes. This finding is

not so much a criticism of the leaders within these districts as it is a statement of the state of succession planning in public schools that is corroborated by the literature.

In general, the leaders used a variety of practices that may influence the retention of principals, but there were not strong systems in place. These practices included stakeholder involvement in the selection process, differentiating support for principals, developing assistant principals and other leaders, and providing ongoing professional development and growth opportunities for principals. Leaders in all of the school districts had defined practices for the selection, onboarding, and ongoing support of principals. Leaders in a few of the school districts, especially Meadowview and Forrestglen, focused on the development of future leaders by developing assistant principals and supporting teachers who are completing a leadership preparation program. School district leaders in only one school district, Riverbend, discussed plans for some succession planning through a focus on talent development as part of their strategic plan.

The principal and school district leader participants also indicated that there were few policies that guided the work to prepare, hire, induct, develop, and retain principals. Leaders in Colorfield, Riverbend, and Ridgetop were able to produce documents that outlined the hiring timelines and processes for principals in their respective school districts. Leaders in most participating school districts also had documents and policies related to induction but were unable to produce documents related to the other components of succession planning and specifically to retention. Banks (HP) voiced, “I don’t think there is an explicit policy, other than the general principle that when you’ve got good people, you seek to retain. If people aren’t so good, you seek to remove them.” Most participants indicated that they were not aware of any written policies besides ones

that aligned with hiring, evaluation, and induction all of which are predicated on state law and often expressed through school board policy at a local level. Sage (HRD) even noted that Meadowview School District was not a policy-driven school district and Oak (AS) stated that leaders in Forrestglen did not want to be restricted by checklists. In regard to principal support, Oak further stated, “There is nothing written down, even right now. We don’t have ‘these are the steps that we are going to take.’ What I have outlined to you is what we feel has to be done and works.” Since most school district leaders were unable to articulate a system of succession practices, they were subsequently unable to systemically evaluate or improve their processes. Participants revealed an absence of ways that school district leaders evaluated how their actions were working to retain well-qualified principals.

In general, the stages of a principal’s career from preparation through retention seemed like distinct phases rather than part of a continuous cycle as described by these participants. While novice principals appreciated the different sources of support, they did not seem to make strong connections between their preparation program, orientation, induction, and the support that they received from their supervisors and colleagues. In exemplary in-service programs, Darling-Hammond et al. (2010) described a learning continuum in which preparation programs were connected to in-service programs. However, in this study, veteran principals expressed a recognition of more support for new principals currently than when they entered the field, but many of them failed to make connections between their role as principal and the development of future leaders. Furthermore, this study revealed that there was an overall lack of understanding of what school district leaders can do systematically to increase the retention of well-qualified

principals as part of a comprehensive succession plan. More than one participant mentioned that that he/she had not thought about actions that school district leaders could take to improve the retention of principals.

Participants in only one of the five school districts seemed to recognize the need for a succession planning process. In Riverbend, school district leaders have embarked on a strategic plan that includes talent development as one of its areas of focus. The strategic plan contains five key strategies within the talent development area: 1) Align professional development with student learning needs, 2) Provide competitive compensation and benefits, 3) Develop leaders, 4) Create an exceptional work environment, and 5) Recruit the best teachers and leaders. There was growing awareness of succession planning and possible actions steps on the part of school district and site-based administrators. For example, Banks (HP) stated:

I think there is a recognition that we have an insufficient process. I don't know that we are sure about what is going to make that better....I think there is a strong view [that] the administrators are paid a sufficiently competitive salary to pull people in. Who knows? I am sure that if you paid lots and lots of money that you would get a better pool, a bigger pool. No guarantee that you would choose the right person because that is kind of like magic. I think we are at the early stages of a root and branch examination of where we are going to go with that. There are some important pieces in place that develop and select and nudging and educating people who are in the district. And a much more developed system of training them so they don't flounder.

Banks' description is comprised of several key components of a succession system including recruiting leaders, selecting leaders, developing future leaders, and supporting leaders as they enter leadership positions.



### **Differentiating Support, Especially For New Administrators**

School district leaders, in their roles as directors of human resources or assistant superintendents, demonstrated the ability to attend to the individual needs of the novice and veteran principals in the school districts where they worked. These leaders had a variety of techniques to do this including tracking systems, weekly or regular visits, phone calls, and text messages. The principal participants reported that they felt supported by their supervisors. Several principals noted the ability of the school district leaders to provide support focused on individual needs rather than every principal receiving the same support.

Kearney (2010) noted that the rewards for principals of giving back to the community, supporting teachers, having greater influence, and progressing on a career path are often overshadowed by the downsides of accountability pressure, lack of support, lack of job security, and demanding schedules. One finding of this study that is worrisome is the difference between veteran and new administrators in terms of how they view the rewards of the principalship. When discussing their longevity in the position, veteran principals often cited some of the rewards mentioned by Kearney, while the concerns of the novice principals reflected some of the downsides of the principalship. White, Cooper and Brayman (2006) noted that principal succession issues can be compounded by the apprehension of younger candidates to embark on the principalship due to the complexity of the task and the dubious benefits. Novice leaders in this study expressed some concerns about job security and demanding schedules, and wished for more supports focused on their specific needs. While these concerns were not expressed by all of the novice principals and these novice principals did realize some of the rewards

of the principal position as well, this difference between the two groups of principals is worth noting if leaders are trying to cultivate leaders. In Riverbend, the induction program was tailored each year based on the positions and the needs of the inductees. Eddy (AS) also used a survey about the challenges faced by people entering a management position as a way to discuss the concerns of the novice leaders. This approach seemed to help the novice administrators recognize, verbalize, and problem-solve their concerns as well as help the school district office leaders understand and attend to their needs. In other school districts, leaders used other ways to personalize and individual the support for novice administrators including more frequent visits and the assignment of mentors and coaches. This observation may reveal that differentiated support based on the specific needs of novice administrators may be a key to retaining beginning leaders.

### **The Challenge of Do-ability**

The role of the school principal has become more challenging as accountability demands have increased and principals are expected to be more than managers (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Principal workforce trends including rapid succession, retirements, and principals leaving the position due to less job satisfaction have exacerbated the challenges that school district leaders have in securing and retaining well-qualified principals that are successful given the current school context (Gates, Ringel, Santibañez, Chung, & Ross, 2003; Markow, Macia, & Lee, 2013; Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011). Participants in this study recognized the increasing challenges of the job of principal. School district leaders noted that the principal's job was demanding and that principals were asked to complete many different responsibilities by the state, the

school district leaders, the staff, and the community. Principals realized the changes in their work's focus and intensity as instructional leaders as they tried to meet the increasing demands of new initiatives and accountability measures. This finding aligns with a 2012 principal satisfaction survey conducted by Metlife in which the majority of principals expressed that their job had become more complex and the responsibilities were not similar to five years ago (Markow et al., 2013). However, about 50% of the principals in the Metlife study also expressed that they were under great stress several days per week (Markow et al., 2013). This sentiment was not conveyed by the principal participants, especially the veteran principals in this study. Since the participants in this study were chosen due to their success as a principal and the school districts were chosen due to their high principal retention rates and/or high TELL survey results, these principals may not be typical or have similar working conditions to the principals that were surveyed by Markow et al.

There are many proposed solutions to make the job of principal more desirable and doable. These solutions include restructuring of the position (Whitaker, 2003), hiring other leaders to take on business or instructional roles (Tucker & Coddington, 2002), clarifying roles and responsibilities (Olson, 2008), providing ongoing professional development (Hartle & Thomas, 2006), providing incentives (Kearney, 2010), and limiting the number and pace of external initiatives (Hargreaves & Fink, 2011). The school district administrators in these five Colorado school districts were aware of the stresses of their principals and employed several strategies to make the principal's job more "doable." These strategies included being mindful of the workload to keep the work engaging and meaningful, providing differentiated support especially for newer

administrators, offering competitive salaries, fostering a collaborative culture among principals, and purposefully building and maintaining supportive relationships between principals and the district administrators.

Principals and school district leaders also understood that the demands of Colorado's new evaluation system were changing the nature of their work. School district leaders were spending more time on the evaluation of their principals and principals were spending more time on the evaluation of their teachers. This meant that both groups were spending more time observing and providing feedback to their respective employees that they evaluated. This shift in their use of time was not viewed as detrimental, but rather, had actually helped the leaders focus their work on improving teaching and learning or on improving the leadership competencies, in the case of the supervisors of the principals. Nevertheless, the implementation of this statewide initiative has increased the workload of principals across the state and there has been little relief for many principals in regard to their other duties and obligations.

### **Being Mindful of the Workload**

School district leaders in this study were mindful of the increasing workload and responded in several ways. There was recognition by school district leaders about what was on the principals' plates. Leaders in Meadowview indicated they had a school district philosophy that helped them be intentional about what ideas they put in place without feeling like they had to be the first (or last) school district to implement every new initiative. This study revealed several instances when school district administrators were intentional about adding a support and the principals noticed and appreciated that support. Both Eddy (AS) and Brook (EP) mentioned that principals in Riverbend were

given flexibility in their use of staffing to meet the needs of their students and staff. According to both Sage (HRD) and Columbine (EP), the professional development times and topics for principals were restructured in Meadowview in response to the needs of the principals. Elementary principals in Colorfield were provided half-time assistant principals in recognition of the demands of the teacher evaluation system and other initiatives. The professional development for principals in many school districts was focused on learning the new evaluation system and on calibrating observations including Ridgetop, Riverbend, and Forrestglen. All of these strategies were intentional efforts on the part of school district leaders to make the job of principal more doable.

### **Promoting a Collaborative Culture**

Leaders in several school districts mentioned collegial and collaborative relationships with other school leaders as a factor for retention. Some of these relationships developed naturally, but others were fostered with the help of school district administrators. Relationships also formed from mentoring relationships or from principals providing mutual support to each other for the tough job of principal. Peer support such as cohort groups and expert support such as mentoring and coaching when implemented well can build environments where problems can be solved, ideas can be tested, and learning together can happen in a non-judgmental setting (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010). School district leaders can use these experiences to help the socialization process for new principals also (Bengston, Zepeda, & Parylo, 2013).

The school district leaders used many structures to shape the collaborative culture including book studies, work committees, level meetings, district leadership meetings, instructional rounds, and professional development opportunities. Participants in these

school districts suggested that people were more honest, more accountable, and helped each other grow more because of the relationships. For example, Sedge (MP) in Meadowview remarked, “We like to work here because we care about each other. We want to see watch other get better. We do challenge each other. We are focused and our relationships are the leading piece to that.” By providing structures that promoted collaboration, school district leaders in these school districts created an atmosphere that facilitated retention. These practices may help school district leaders retain principals when used thoughtfully as formal, collective, and investiture socialization tactics (Bengston et al., 2013).

### **Relationships Between Principals And Supervisors**

While there is literature to support that positive relationships between principals and teachers improve teacher retention and student achievement (NTC, 2013), participants in this study indicated that positive relationships between principals and their supervisors were a factor for principal retention. Supervisors and other school district administrators were key supports for the principals in this study. The school district administrators were committed to being accessible and visible in the schools. Administrators demonstrated support for the principals through their actions and visibility. They also supported the growth of the principals through the evaluation process.

### **The Role of the Community in the Retention of Principals**

While many of the findings in this study are actionable, there is one finding from the study that is harder for school district leaders to address. Participants indicated that

two aspects of the community played a strong role in the retention of principals: the geographic location of the community and the community support. Not every school district leader is fortunate to work in a beautiful location or have opportunities for outdoor activities nearby. However, school district leaders can work with local chambers of commerce and business leaders to promote the benefits of living in a community, wherever it is. I noticed that several of the websites for these school districts had links, pictures, and articles related to the community and celebrating the connections between the community and the school district. In regard to community support, again, not every community has great public support of its schools. While there is national concern about the state of public schools in America and attempts to “fix” schools through accountability systems, vouchers, and charter school legislation, recently school district leaders and teachers have recently taken a more active role in promoting schools and public support for them. They have also taken strides to form partnerships with community entities. This said, it is not surprising that “Community Partnerships” is another focus area of the Riverbend strategic plan. In Riverbend, this focus area includes a strategy of creating reciprocal and responsive modes and methods of community engagement. In Colorfield School District, it is unlikely that the community passed a mill levy and a bond without the school district employees working to gain support of community members. Other participants in this study mentioned district-wide communication as a vehicle to promote the activities within the school district. Every school district had numerous ways that they engaged principals, teachers, and other school district employees in the work and decision of the school district. Finally, participants mentioned their connections and relationships within their community as a

reason to stay. While within Forrestglen it was an expectation of the community and the school district leaders for principals to be involved in the community, this expectation also helped retain principals since it was harder for families to move once they got settled and established relationships, according to Elm (HP). School district leaders could take action by helping new administrators connect with other people within the community and assisting families to become part of the community at large.

### **Implications**

These findings, developed from the examination of the data and current literature, reveal several implications for school district administrators and principals. First, school district leaders and principals must take a more active role in developing an adequate pool of leaders that will be well-qualified, willing, and ready to take on the principal positions given the context of public schools today. While leaders in different school district and schools placed different amounts of emphasis on strategies to develop future leaders, they all had strategies and approaches to secure more leaders. Developing leadership competencies in assistant principals and novice principals through mentoring, coaching, induction, and ongoing professional development is an action that should not be overlooked. Darling-Hammond et al. (2010) described exemplary in-service programs where these school districts organized a continuous learning program throughout a principal's career rather than a series of one-shot workshops. Exemplary programs also featured collegial learning networks, study groups, mentoring, and peer coaching focused on instructional leadership, which are tactics that these school district leaders utilized. Induction and school district-provided professional development are avenues to develop leaders that allow school district leaders to provide support and professional development



on initiatives and programs that are important to the school district's success.

Professional development also shows an investment in current leaders that may be helpful to retention. Leaders need to be thoughtful and deliberate to connect the professional development. Leadership development cannot occur only with people already in leadership positions. School leaders need to consider how to develop leaders in their building as teacher leaders and as possible future principal candidates.

Leading schools to sustain high performing schools and turn around low-performing schools will require school district leaders to attract and retain the best and the brightest school leaders (Harchar & Campbell, 2010). In this study, school district leaders were focused on hiring the best. They used different approaches such as hiring early, involving stakeholders in the process, selecting candidates that were a fit with the needs of the school, moving beyond a simple interview and reference check, and requiring performance assessments. While these strategies may help the school district leaders select a better candidate, without thoughtful and intentional development of future leaders, it will not be possible for school district leaders to hire the best. Two strategies that were underutilized by most school district leaders in this study were tapping of future leaders and creating partnerships with preparation programs.

The second implication of these findings is the need to have systematic solutions to make the job of school principal more doable. So many of the solutions proposed to address the principal workforce trends involve restructuring schools and reallocating funds. Succession planning, on the other hand, can be a cost-effective way to can help organizations be more forward thinking, instead of simply reacting to each new demand or initiative.

The third implication for these findings is a reminder that leadership is about relationships. In this study, the relationships between various stakeholders and principals, principals and their communities, principals and their supervisors, and among principals were noted. Each of these relationships were recognized as important to the development and retention of leaders. Leaders in these school districts influenced the retention of the principals in ways that were centered on relationships also, such as differentiating support for individual principals, fostering a collaborative culture, and maintaining supportive relationships with the principals. It is unclear if these actions were related to the people sitting in those positions or a shared culture inside the school district.

### **Suggestions for Educational Leaders**

It is important to note several succession practices that were helpful to hiring and retaining well-qualified principals in these select school districts. As discussed earlier, these school district leaders did not have fully developed succession planning practices flushed out. However, these leaders took several actions in regard to principal succession to which other stakeholders, school district leaders, and school principals should pay attention. These school district leaders leveraged their current practices that supported principals. Additional actions helped these school district leaders respond to two challenges regarding the long-term retention of school leaders: securing enough potential candidates that are ready to take on the demands of the principal position and retaining successful principals given the current demands and challenges of the position itself.

Based on the findings of this study, school district leaders should leverage their current supports for principals through the following actions:

1. Implement purposeful induction programs
2. Provide mentoring and coaching for new and veteran principals
3. Grow current leaders through professional development and supervision process
4. Offer transition support for leaders taking on new roles

To ensure an adequate pool of potential well qualified candidates, leaders concerned about having an adequate supply of well-qualified principals should consider the following actions:

1. Provide teacher leader opportunities
2. Partner with preparation programs to shape programs
3. Develop assistant principals
4. Encourage tapping of future leaders
5. Seek principal candidates that meet the needs of the school district and the school

Based on the findings of this study, leaders should apply the following strategies to retain principals that are successful:

1. Be mindful of the workload to keep the work engaging and meaningful
2. Provide differentiated support, especially for newer administrators
3. Foster a collaborative culture among principals
4. Build and maintain supportive relationships between principals and school district administrators

Whitaker (2003) recognized that solving the problems of recruiting and retaining principals will take coordinated and collaborative action on the part of governing bodies,

schools, school districts, universities, states, and professional organizations. As mentioned earlier, participants in each of the five school districts placed different emphasis on these actions depending on their role, their situation, and their personal beliefs as in the case of tapping. While school district leaders may have promising practices in any of these areas and could strengthen their practices in any of these areas, probably the most essential action is the creation of systems to integrate and coordinate these experiences. A comprehensive plan to cultivate leaders could involve the development of an action plan or could simply start by discussing the avenues for leader development, making people more aware of these avenues, and then making plans to reinforce the connections between each activity.

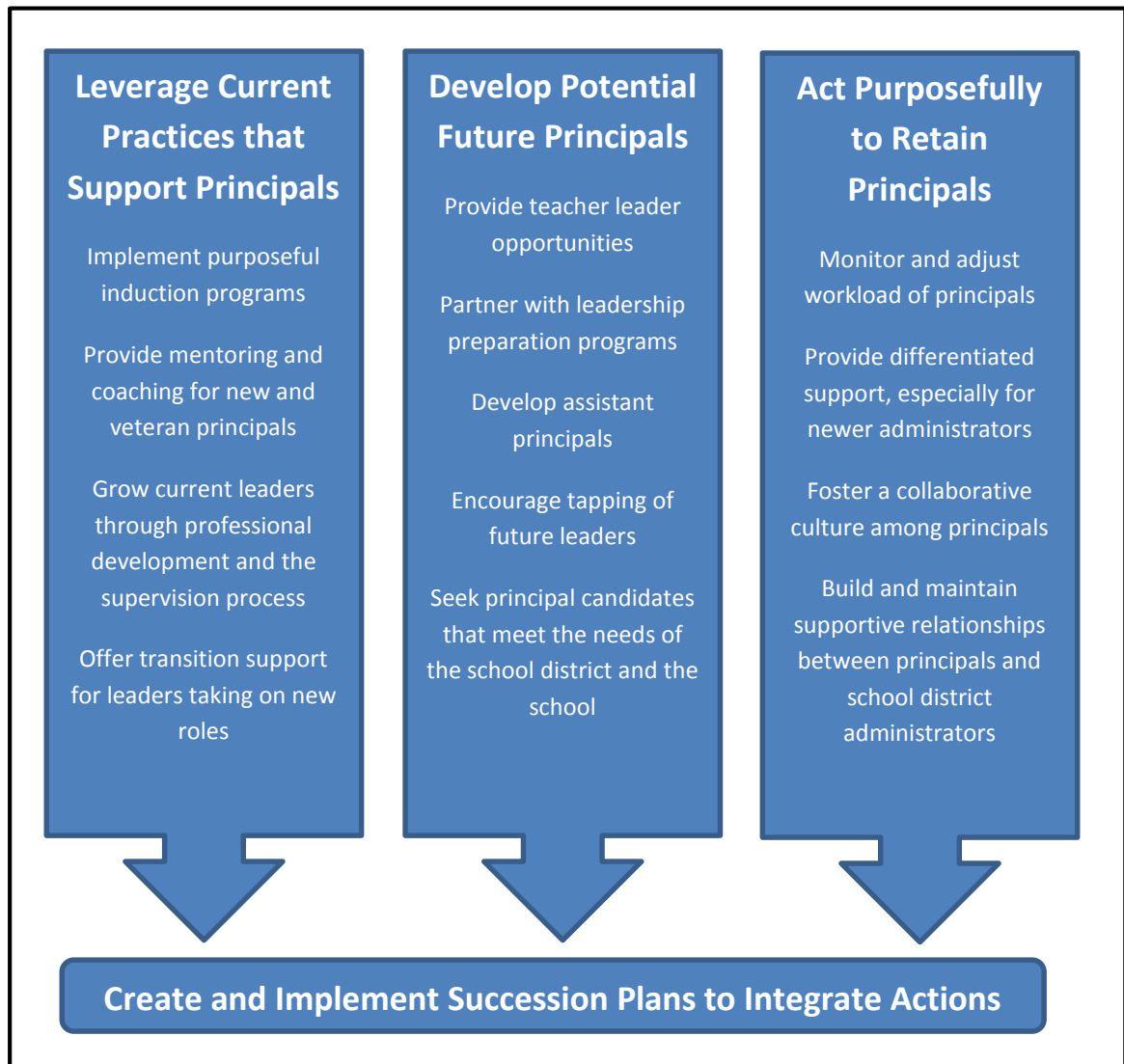
A summary of the actions that school district leaders can take that support principal succession is offered in Figure 2. This figure show actions that school district leaders should consider to impact current practices aligned with succession, develop potential future principals, and retain leaders. This figure should not be viewed as a list of discrete action steps but rather as avenues to strengthen succession practices and considerations in any succession plan. Without comprehensive plans, it may be hard to sustain these actions and make any progress on the goals of developing and retaining successful school leaders.

A final recommendation for leaders concerned about retaining the quality and quantity of principals that are needed to provide leadership at schools is to formalize succession practices and policies. In this study, even school district leaders with good practices in several areas that affect principal retention often failed to make their approaches more overt and possibly more sustainable through the formalization of these

approaches into policies and procedures. Each of these school districts had one school district leader who was the driver of the succession practices. Without formalizing these ideas, it is hard to surmise if these practices and actions would be sustained if there was a change in leadership. Given the rapid succession of school leaders, budget constraints, and changing contexts, school district leaders would be well advised to make their succession practices more transparent. White et al. (2006) in a study of succession practices in three school districts recommended that school districts consider policy, practices, and procedures that cover the breadth and depth of principal succession including principal recruitment, interviewing, induction, and ongoing support. Hartle and Thomas (2006) recognized that leadership succession planning/talent management needed to be integrated in ways that link and resolve the following issues:

- What is our organisation's core purpose?
- What are our strategies to fulfil this purpose?
- What leadership roles do we need to help us achieve this purpose?
- What knowledge, skills, experience and competencies do school leaders need to be successful?
- How do we recruit people with these qualities?
- How do we develop them?
- How do we manage individual performance?
- How do we reward and recognise individual leaders' contributions?
- How do we retain key staff?
- How do we fill leadership positions when people leave? (p. 46)

This is only one model for succession planning. Schmidt-Davis and Bottoms (2011) and Maryland State Department of Education (2006) also proposed models and guidance for leaders wanting to invest in the future of their leaders through succession planning.



*Figure 2. Summary of Actions that Support Principal Succession*

### **Limitations**

As discussed in Chapter III, there are limitations of this study given that the sampling techniques that I employed to find information-rich cases had not been used prior to this study. A main limitation of this study is the inability to generalize the

findings, but the findings of this study, by design, were meant to be illustrative rather than generalizable from a qualitative study (Creswell, 2007; Patton 2002). While it is hoped that the sampling techniques employed would produce information-rich cases for analysis (Patton, 2002), this study was not an exhaustive study of every principal and school district leader from these selected school districts nor of every possible case. Through semi-structured interviews and the analyses of the data, I was able to collect rich descriptions of the succession practices of these five school districts. Also, through constant comparative techniques involving multiple participants and multiple sites, I was able to elaborate on the varieties of practice (Bassey, 2007) and identify codes and categories that are useful to practitioners and policy makers (Charmaz, 2001; Creswell, 2008).

Researcher bias is always a possible limitation that must be acknowledged. Preconceived ideas may have influenced the data analysis, findings, and conclusions of this study. However, by following the design procedures outlined in Chapter III, bias was reduced. Through a thorough examination of the data, bracketing my beliefs, using open and axial coding, using constant comparative techniques, and member checking I have attempted to mitigate the bias (Charmaz, 2001; Merriam, 2009; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I have included words and lengthy quotations from the participants rather than my interpretations of their ideas in Chapter IV. I disclose the possibility of bias here so that readers and future practitioners can consider this possible bias as they construct their own meaning and implications of the data presented.

### **Researcher's Reflections**

As noted by Creswell (2007), the researcher cannot be separated from the research. Throughout the procedure I bracketed my beliefs and followed procedures to allow me to be open to emergent themes and not be tied to preconceived notions. Now as I conclude this research project, I have reflected about how this research has affected me as a practitioner and leader in a school district. At the onset of this project, I described five beliefs that I brought to the project based on my work as a teacher, principal, and school district administrator: 1) I believe that school personnel are important in the improvement of schools and student achievement; 2) I believe that the selection of a principal within a school district or for a particular school is an important decision that sometimes not given the due diligence it deserves; 3) I believe that thoughtful and purposeful planning of succession practices can increase the chances that a principal will succeed for the betterment of the school; 4) I believe that all leaders within an organization have a responsibility to help future leaders for the benefit of students; and 5) I believe that understanding and enhancing succession practices is an avenue to sustain improvements. I will reflect on the data and findings of this study in relationship to these beliefs.

I believe that school personnel are important in the improvement of schools and student achievement. Over the past few years, I have been in positions where I am privileged to work closely with principals and assistant principals. I think that there is a science and an art to being a successful school leader. The school principals in this study were incredible leaders who made the success of adults and students a priority. Their passion and commitment to the job were commendable. Green's (MP) sadness at retiring



after 22 years as principal at the same middle school was touching. Pine (EP) had a lilt in his step as he and I walked the halls, peered into classrooms, went to the cafeteria, and admired student writing samples posted on the walls of his school. A young student visitor interrupted my interview with White (EP) to bring him a treat, which spurred a smile on his face that was authentic, warm, and inviting. Banks (HP) stated that he would be just as enthusiastic about entering school administration today as he was almost thirty years ago. Although the work brought them joy, these veteran principals were also realistic about the work. Boulder (MP) recognized that principals need more than instructional know-how and have to deal with conflict and people issues on a consistent basis. Columbine (EP) mentioned that difficult situations such as a student death or staff feeling overwhelmed are part of the real work of principals.

I believe that the selection of a principal within a school district or for a particular school is an important decision that sometimes not given the due diligence it deserves. The data and practices in these five school districts have caused me to rethink this belief. School district leaders were purposeful in designing and carrying out selection processes that they felt helped them select good leaders for their situations. I realize how narrowly I stated this belief. It is really my hope that school district leaders give due diligence to all components of a succession plan, not just the principal selection process.

I believe that thoughtful and purposeful planning of succession practices can increase the chances that a principal will succeed for the betterment of the school. For the veteran principals in this study, the day to day benefits of serving the staff and students of their schools seemed to outweigh any current stresses or rising demands associated with the principalship. This was not always the case for the newer

administrators. These newer administrators expressed that they were not sure if the long days and weeks were worth it and if they would remain as an administrator for a long time. This sentiment concerns me. The participants in this study provided some insight into succession practices that might help these novice principals succeed also. To help retain these leaders, school district leaders need to provide differentiated support based on their needs, a collaborative environment, and supportive relationships with peers, mentors, and supervisors. However, school district leaders still need to further ponder what it will take to retain this younger generation and what supports and/or rewards might make these novice leaders consider staying in the position of principal.

I believe that all leaders within an organization have a responsibility to help future leaders for the benefit of students. As I call for more connected and developed systems to develop future leaders, I realize that I, like many of the principals and leaders, have not stepped up and accepted my full responsibility in this endeavor either. I will be more conscious of the responsibility that I believe all school district leaders bear to build up teacher leaders, future principals, and future school district leaders. After completing this study, I am compelled to rethink the role of induction, professional networks, preparation programs, mentors, coaches, and supervisors and what it means to develop leaders using a learning continuum.

I believe that understanding and enhancing succession practices is an avenue to sustain improvements. I realize that I, like many of the participants in this study, still see each stage of a principal's career as a separate event. I have failed to connect the dots between all of the components of succession planning in my own work. I mentioned to several of participants, when they apologized for not thinking about a facet of succession

or having more structures in place, that we are all on a journey to developing stronger succession practices. I, too, have grown in my understanding and use of practices that I hope will grow and retain school leaders. In the last few years I have had the opportunity to design a selection process that honors the voices of the school stakeholders, to work purposefully with newly selected leaders to design an entry plan to aid in their success, to work with school district leaders around the idea of planned and unplanned discontinuity and continuity to clarify our short-term and long-term goals for our school leaders and determine any principal transfers, and to create a support plan for new administrators. I now need to formalize some of these practices so that each change of top-ranking leaders does not mean a change in the way that the leaders in the school system hire, induct, support, grow, and retain leaders.

I realize now that as I began this project, I was looking for systems of succession. In my world view, when leaders make sense of the pieces, when they construct systems that are meaningful, they demonstrate caring. The participants in this study forced me to remember that systems do not create good places for adults to work and for children to learn. People do. Relationships are really the heart of the work in schools. Without relationships, learning is stifled. With relationships, change, risk and growth are possible. As I conclude this study, I am still pressing for systems. I am still urging school leaders to make connections between the different components of succession planning. The words and actions of the participants in this study reminded me that change does not happen because something is a good idea or that something makes sense as in the case of succession planning. Change takes place one person at a time, one interaction at a time, one relationship at a time.

### **Recommendations for Future Study**

Given that succession planning in schools is a relatively new and under-developed concept, there exists a paucity of research, and there are so many dimensions to succession planning, succession planning is a rich research topic that has barely been explored. Based on the scope and findings of this study, here are recommendations for future study:

1. Extend this study by including the voices of more stakeholders regarding the development and retention of school principals. Stakeholders could include state leaders, other school district leaders, aspiring leaders, current leaders, exiting leaders, teachers, and other members of the school community.
2. Extend this study by exploring the connections between school improvement results and succession practices.
3. Extend this study by examining how the extent of succession activities and formal processes relate to the size of the school district and other principal demographics.
4. Conduct a quantitative study of the practices of school districts across the state to see how widespread the succession practices of these school district leaders were compared to other school districts.
5. Further explore the succession practices of one or more school districts using longitudinal data to study the effects of implementing succession practices and the influence that high-ranking leadership changes have on succession practices.

In addition, the particular findings of this study raise several questions that could be explored in further studies:

1. Expand this study to assess the prevalence of succession planning and succession planning components within school districts with high principal turnover, low principal retention rates, and/or low teacher satisfaction scores as measured by the TELL survey. Another study could explore the similarities and differences between the practices of the school districts in this study and school districts with low results.
2. Extend this study by evaluating the effectiveness of the succession practices within a school district(s) since this study indicated that little or no evaluation has been conducted.
3. Provide further exploration of specific actions that school district leaders can do to create and maintain positive working relationships between principals and their supervisors since most of the research conducted to date on organizational trust focuses on the relationship between principals and teachers.
4. Since this study focused on successful principals, those who had served in a school district for several years or novice principals who were continuing in their position, a follow up study could be conducted with principals who had left the school district or who were unsuccessful. The findings from that study could help fortify or possibly refute the findings of this study.
5. This study noted differences between veteran principals who are generally nearing retirement age and novice principals in regard to attitudes. Since

there are high numbers of principals nearing retirement age, a follow up study could be conducted that focuses on what school district leaders can do to support the development and retention of younger school leaders.

6. An additional study could verify the themes identified by the researcher in this study using a mixed method including a perception survey of all principals within a district rather than those who were recommended for this study.

### **Conclusion**

Schools will continue to need well-qualified principals that are committed to leading today's schools. School district leaders have an interest in hiring and retaining school leaders who are a good fit for their school district and will serve as long-term effective leaders. Succession planning can improve both the quality and quantity of leaders and can put school district leaders in the driver's seat when it comes to hiring and retaining principals that meet their needs. This study of the succession practices in five Colorado school districts provided insight into several actions that school district leaders can take to address two major challenges regarding the principalship: developing adequate potential principal candidates and retaining successful principals. All of these actions could be fortified through the development of more formalized succession plans. Without strong succession practices, school district leaders will continue to struggle to fill these positions and jeopardize the future success of schools and students.

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**APPENDIX A**

**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL**



*Institutional Review Board*

DATE: October 3, 2014

TO: Amie Cieminski

FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [639919-1] Practices that Support Principal Succession

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVAL/VERIFICATION OF

EXEMPT STATUS DECISION DATE: October 3, 2014

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB approves this project and verifies its status as EXEMPT according to federal IRB regulations.

**Ms. Cieminski -**

**Hello and thank you very much for your patience with the IRB process. My sincere apologies for the lengthy review time. Your application is very thorough and clear and as such I have no requests for additional materials or revisions.**

**Best wishes with your research and please don't hesitate to contact me with any IRB-related questions or concerns.**

**Sincerely,**

**Dr. Megan Stellino, UNC IRB Co-Chair**

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records for a duration of 4 years.

If you have any questions, please contact Sherry May at 970-351-1910 or [Sherry.May@unco.edu](mailto:Sherry.May@unco.edu). Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB's records.

**APPENDIX B**

**LETTER OF INTRODUCTION**



May 12, 2014

Dear Superintendent,

I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership and Policies Program at the University of Northern Colorado. I am conducting research regarding succession practices of principals.

I want to explore what your school district personnel do to help hire, orient, and retain principals who can meet the school leadership needs of your school district. Your district is one of just a few districts that I have chosen to investigate due to your high teacher satisfactions scores from the 2013 TELL Colorado Survey and/or high principal retention rates. I am seeking permission to conduct research within your district.

I am requesting that you identify a key contact (possibly the human resource director) that would name and provide contact information for potential participants. I am seeking permission to interview the following persons who are knowledgeable about your succession practices:

- A district administrator who hires principals
- A district administrator who supervises and evaluates principals
- One principal who has recently participated in the district's orientation or induction
- One principal who has served as principal in the same school for several years

I will come to your school district and conduct interviews on two consecutive days that are convenient for your school district personnel. Here are the details for the interviews:

- Each semi-structured interview will be scheduled for 60-80 minutes at a time and location convenient to the individual participant
- Each interview will be digitally recorded and then typed into transcripts prior to data analysis
- Each participant will be assigned a pseudonym and data will be treated confidentially

Another aspect of the research involves reviewing any documents that your school district uses for the preparation, selection, orientation, or retention of principal candidates. I will request a copy of any electronic or paper documents and they may be part of the analysis and final report.

I am requesting a response to this inquiry that would indicate your district's preliminary commitment to participate in the study. Please let me know of any other permission that is needed to conduct this research in your school district. Thank you for consideration.

Amie Cieminski,  
 Doctoral Candidate, UNC Graduate School  
 Phone Number: 970.576.1068  
 E-mail: [ciem4587@bears.unco.edu](mailto:ciem4587@bears.unco.edu)

## **APPENDIX C**

### **STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SCHOOL DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS**

## **Structured Interview Guide for School District Administrators**

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed today for my research at the University of Northern Colorado regarding principal succession. I have a protocol that will ask about recruitment and selection, orientation, and retention practices for principals. Please review and sign the consent form. Your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time. With your permission, I will be recording our conversation and taking notes. Do you have any questions?

### **Introduction**

1. Please tell me about your current leadership role, background, and experiences as they relate to hiring and developing principals.

### **Recruitment and Selection**

2. Describe the process for recruitment and selection of principals in your school district.
3. Tell me what characteristics and experiences your district seeks in successful candidates. How is the candidate pool in relation to these qualifications?
4. Describe any early identification or leadership preparation programs that you have in your district.

### **Orientation and Induction**

5. What supports are in place for principals when they take on a new role? To what extent are these supports helpful to principals?
6. Tell me about any formal socialization programs including orientation, induction, and mentoring.

### **Retention**

7. What formal supports are in place to help the growth of principals?
8. What informal supports are in place to help the growth of principals?
9. Describe any ways that the supervision and evaluation process used in your district to support the growth of principals.
10. What policies and practices are used to aid in the retention of principals? How are those working to retain principals?

11. (For school districts with high principal retention rates) Your district's retention rate for principals was higher than other districts similar to yours, to what do you attribute this?

**System**

12. (For school districts with high teacher satisfaction) According to the Colorado Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning (TELL) Survey, your teachers report high satisfaction in your district. What do you think is the relationship between your district's leadership succession practices and teacher satisfaction?
13. Describe any ways that your district communicates your succession planning process. Do you have any documents or written policies regarding aspects of principal succession?
14. Describe any ways that your district evaluates the succession planning process.
15. How are the district's practices working to hire and retain principals that are successful and willing to stay in this school district?
16. Is there any else you would like to add to help me understand the school district's processes for the selection, induction, and retention of principals?

**APPENDIX D**

**STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE**

**FOR PRINCIPALS**



## **Structured Interview Guide for Principals**

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed today for my research at the University of Northern Colorado regarding principal succession. I have a protocol that will ask about recruitment and selection, orientation, and retention practices for principals. Please review and sign the consent form. Your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time. With your permission, I will be recording our conversation and taking notes. Do you have any questions?

### **Introduction**

1. Please describe your current role, your background, and experiences that prepared you for this role.

### **Recruitment and Selection**

2. Tell me about the recruitment and selection process that was used when you were hired for your current position.
3. Describe the characteristics and experiences your school district seeks in successful candidates.
4. Describe any early identification or leadership preparation programs that you have in your district.

### **Orientation and Induction**

5. Describe the supports that you experienced as you first took on your current role of principal at this school. To what extent were these supports helpful to you?
6. Describe how you experienced any formal socialization programs that are in place including orientation, induction, and mentoring.

### **Retention**

7. What formal supports are in place to help the growth of principals?
8. What informal supports are in place to help the growth of principals?
9. Describe any ways that the supervision and evaluation process used in your district to support the growth of principals.
10. What policies and practices are used to aid in the retention of principals? How are those working to retain principals?
11. (For school districts with high principal retention rates) Your district's retention rate for principals was higher than other districts similar to yours, to what do you attribute this?

**System**

12. (For school districts with high teacher satisfaction) According to the Colorado Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning (TELL) Survey, teachers report high satisfaction in your district. What do you think is the relationship between your district's leadership succession practices and teacher satisfaction?
13. Describe any ways that your district communicates your succession planning process. Do you have any documents or written policies regarding aspects of principal succession?
14. Describe any ways that your district evaluates the succession planning process.
15. How are the district's practices working to hire and retain principals that are successful and willing to stay in this school district?
16. Is there any else you would like to add to help me understand the district's processes for the selection, induction, and retention of principals?

## **APPENDIX E**

### **WORKING NOTES OF SUCCESSION PRACTICES IN SCHOOL DISTRICTS WITH HIGH COLORADO TEACHING, EMPOWERING, LEADING, AND LEARNING SURVEY RESULTS**

Working Notes of Succession Practices for School Districts with High Colorado Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning Survey Results

<b>School District</b>	<b>Colorfield</b>	<b>Forrestglen</b>	<b>Ridgetop</b>
District Profile	Lower than average demographic challenges About 27,000 students	Average demographic challenges About 5,000 students	Higher than average demographic challenges Just under 6,000 students
Participants	Pewter (AS) White (EP) Green (MP) Turquoise (HAP)	Maple (S) Oak (AS) Elm (HP) Pine (EP)	Peak (AS) Boulder (EP) Summit (EP)
Preparation	No strong sense of cohorts with university; nothing coordinated	Draw from several programs; know who is in programs, put in charge of committees	Draw from variety; no internal advantage
Hiring	Used to be all building led, now district has more input up front; value input from stakeholders	Value input but have to make decision at the end of the day	Stakeholder input upfront and then strengths and weaknesses
Interview Process	3 interviews: district team, building team, final with assistant superintendent (AS) and superintendent (S)	Community fit important; traditional interview with reference check; superintendent decides	Gather input from stakeholders: 3 step interview process (district interview with data presentation, building walkthrough, meet and greet session) AS and S gather input (strengths and weaknesses)

Continued Working Notes of Succession Practices for School Districts with High Colorado Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning Survey Results

<b>School District</b>	<b>Colorfield</b>	<b>Forrestglenn</b>	<b>Ridgetop</b>
Support for Principals	Individualized and differentiated	Important for district administrators to be in the buildings	Support offered when asked
Transition	Start early by including in communication, information, and meetings	Two parts: talk to teachers and others (Listening Tour) and develop entry plan with district administrators	Individualized; important for new person to hire any new staff
Assistant Principal (AP) to Principal	AP role not guarantee for principalship but gives experience	Grow APs into principals; provide every experience and develop	APs not hired at district level; expect principal to prepare APs but will hire the best for principal
Induction	Used retired principals with APs; others assigned mentor, no formal induction meetings	Thorough induction process that lasts throughout 3-year initial license; go through standards and provide mentor	Go through standards and assign mentor
Principal Meetings	Mix of professional development and business	Meetings mix of development and business	Meetings mix of professional development and business
Role of Teacher Input	Ask them and follow through	Relationships are professional and personal; get people to follow; opportunities for teacher leaders; encouraged	Survey and require questions
Teacher's Union	No one mentioned union	Coordinating Council instead of teachers union	Has union but not mentioned

**APPENDIX F****WORKING NOTES OF SUCCESSION PRACTICES  
IN SCHOOL DISTRICTS WITH HIGH  
PRINCIPAL RETENTION RATES**

# Working Notes of Succession Practices in School Districts with High Principal Retention Rates

School District	Colorfield	Meadowview	Riverbend
Profile	Lower than average demographic challenges About 27,000 students	Average demographic challenges About 9,000 students	Higher than average demographic challenges About 5,500 students
Participants	Pewter (AS) White (EP) Green (MP) Turquoise (HAP)	Sage (HRD) Columbine (EP) Sedge (MP)	Eddy (AS) Stream (HRD) Banks (HP) Brook (EP)
Preparation Program Connections	University programs are close but do not have strong pipeline	Begin cohorts regularly in partnership with universities	Offered programs through different universities
Principal Candidates	Tend to garner large pools and to hire principals with experience	Mostly internal hiring where candidates move from teacher ranks to assistant principal to principal over several years	Want to find quality leaders that have certain leadership dispositions
Selection Process	Input process with staff, use a representative committee	Post internally first, input process with staff, superintendent decides; hire the best person, not just internal	Input process with staff, representative committee, interview plus some performance assessment
Stakeholder Involvement	Go to school, build profile, district personnel will screen candidates first	Stakeholder involvement with hiring, identify strengths and needs	Stakeholders identify qualities of candidates and then give feedback on strengths and weaknesses of candidates
Induction	Inductees complete activities related to each principal standard and work with an assigned mentor who has been successful in a similar role	School district leaders provide induction program tailored to the information, programs, and structures in the school district; retired principals serve as mentors	Induction program includes a series of meetings and training that is tailored each year to meet needs of the inductees; includes project

Continued Working Notes of Succession Practices in School Districts with High Principal Retention Rates

School District	Colorfield	Meadowview	Riverbend
Ongoing Development of Principals	Principal meetings are a mix of professional development and business; additional learning teams and work groups	Structure includes weekly principal meetings and additional professional development for principals, and a principal summit to kick off each year	Monthly leadership meetings with all principals, assistant principals and school district leaders; other meetings, professional development and instructional rounds by level
Transition	Start early with contact and communication	Transition important-start early	Support early in principalship
View of Role of Assistant Principal	Assistant principal position not seen as ascension to the principalship or connected to the principal hiring process; some teachers and assistant principals have gone to other school districts to gain administrative experience	Coach up assistant principals so they are ready to be principals. Almost all principals have been teachers and assistant principals in the district; with high principal retention rate, it can take an assistant principal many years to secure a principal position	Recently, principals have been asked to hire assistant principals that could be a future principal or the principal's successor; more intentional hiring and developing assistant principals as instructional leaders rather than managers
Access and Visibility	Frequent checks; individualized	System of support-call anyone, anytime; whisperers	Retention based on relationships, spending time in schools, partnership
Teacher's Union	Teacher input is valued but no one mentioned the importance of the teacher's union	No union but have an employee input process, several representative committees. and workgroups	No formal bargaining agreement but use an interest-based problem solving process